HAU

Is there a place for faith in anthropology?

Religion, reason, and the ethnographer's divine revelation*

Rane Willerslev, *The National Museum of Denmark*
Christian Suhr, *Aarhus University*

Anthropological insights are not produced or constructed through reasoned discourse alone. Often they appear to be given in "leaps of faith" as the anthropologist's conceptual grasp upon the world is lost. To understand these peculiar moments, we adopt the Kierkegaardian concept of religious faith, not as certitude in some transcendental principle, but as a deeply paradoxical mode of knowing, whose paths bend and twist through glimpses of understanding, doubt, and existential resignation. Pointing to the ways in which such revelatory and disruptive experiences have influenced the work of many anthropologists, we argue that anthropology is not simply a social science, but also a theology of sorts, whose ultimate foundation might not simply be reason but faith.

Keywords: Faith, doubt, fieldwork, anthropological knowledge, religious experience

What place, if any, does religious faith hold in anthropological inquiry? Is the anthropological revelation of life solely a human intellectual endeavor? Or is something more required—perhaps what we might call divine intervention (Howland 2008: 27)?

Throughout the history of the discipline, various anthropologists have debated this question, sometimes arriving at the conclusion that religious faith is indeed antithetical to anthropology (see, e.g., Tylor [1871] 1958; Frazer [1911] 1959; Fortes 1980). Yet recently a number of scholars have suggested that anthropologists who are themselves religious believers may in fact contribute in significant ways to the study of religious faith and should not simply be ignored as matter out of place (Howell 2007; Corduan 2013; Robbins 2015; Luhrmann 2016). Moreover, several scholars (e.g., Cannell 2005; Larsen 2014) have illustrated how the history of anthropology—conventionally conceived as a decidedly secular discipline—in fact contradicts the standard narrative that modern and secular thinking will displace religious belief.

Here we wish to take this line of argument a step further. Our claim is that anthropological insight cannot be achieved through reasoned discourse alone. Sometimes a qualitative shift in perspective is required by which the fieldworker is forced to embrace what otherwise appears to be logically impossible or absurd. In this article we focus specifically on the impact of such disruptive experiences for anthropologists who are engaged in the study of religious, spiritual, or magical practices, but we suggest that such experiences may be equally important to anthropologists who study other facets of human life that are not explicitly religious. Religious traditions offer a language through which to deal with such shifts in perspective, and in this article we propose they might best be described as "leaps of faith." In this, we call for a turn toward "methodological faith," as opposed to the conventional doctrine of "methodological atheism" (Berger 1967: 106, 182), which holds that anthropologists are obliged not to take apparently absurd religious experiences at face value (Gell 1999: 160–61).

Paradoxically, some recent attempts to take religiosity seriously, especially by anthropologists who subscribe to the so-called "ontological turn," have largely been hostile to notions such as belief or faith, which are conceived of as Western, monotheistic, hegemonic concepts that have no place in the study of other ontol-

*Both authors contributed equally to this article.

ogies (Viveiros des Castro 2011; see also Tambiah 1990; Asad 2003; Bubandt 2014 for similar criticisms). By contrast, we suggest that rather than an obstacle to anthropological knowledge, faith could in fact be a prerequisite for it.

In proposing this argument, we adopt the Kierkegaardian understanding of religious faith: not as certitude in some transcendental principle, but as a deeply insecure, paradoxical state of being. Søren Kierkegaard ([1843] 2005; see also Tomlinson 2014) claimed that the sacrifice in faith of any rationality, perceptual grasp, or even basic ethics was crucial in order to embrace the paradoxes of human existence. Critically engaging with Kierkegaard's insights, we suggest that the problem in anthropology is not that we have too much faith, but perhaps that we have too little.

The ambiguous place of faith in the anthropology of religion

The ongoing debate over the role of faith among anthropologists runs parallel to the larger public discussion of whether or not God exists. The so-called "God question" has produced what popular media have labeled a "war" between science and religion (Barbour 2013). At one extreme stands an atheistic movement endorsed by committed philosophers (see Antony 2007), evolutionary biologists (Dawkins 2006), and physicists (Hawking in Lennox 2011), who claim that a devotion to logical reason always also implies atheism. Accordingly, there is no role for a divinity of any kind to play its part when it comes to uncovering the secrets of life (McGhee 2009: xviii).

Facing them are so-called "religious fundamentalists," such as conservative Christians in the United States (see, e.g., Shaunfield 2013) and the Harun Yahya movement in Turkey (Riexinger 2008), who claim that life is intelligently predesigned by God, as narrated in the Bible or the Qur'an. The new atheists accuse people of faith of fundamentalism and stupidity; the religious conservatives claim that the evolutionary tale is false and lacking any solid evidence (McGhee 2009; Blanes and Oustinova-Stjepanovic 2015: 12). The malevolent tone of this polemical dispute has made it difficult to conceive of any meeting point, coexistence, or even codependency of reason and faith. As Talal Asad (2003) points out, however, religion as we have come to understand it today cannot fully be conceived without "secular science" as its defining counterpoint. In a similar vein, we may ask whether science can be understood without religion; and

more fundamentally, whether faith, rather than being the opposite of reason, is reason's ultimate source and endpoint.

In the history of our discipline, arguments for and against the existence of the divine were at the forefront of anthropological inquiry. It is well known that E. B. Tylor ([1871] 1958) and James Frazer (1959 [1911]) considered religious faith to be some form of "illusion" and that they forged their theories about animism, magic, and totemism based on this hypothesis. In fact, Tylor was not just an ordinary unbeliever, but a "militant atheist," who, as E. E. Evans-Pritchard (1965: 15) wrote, "sought, and found, in primitive religion a weapon which could be used with deadly effect against Christianity." These early anthropologists, therefore, located themselves on the side of scientific fundamentalism (Willerslev 2013; Larsen 2014: 3ff.).

In recent decades, anthropologists have become more sympathetic toward the religious beliefs of the people they study. Nevertheless, the discipline still continues to be largely situated in what sociologist Peter Berger (1967) denoted as "methodological atheism" (Gell 1999: 160; see Porpora 2006 for a critique). Meyer Fortes encapsulated what this entails in the preface to an anthology on "sacrifice," containing papers from both anthropologists and theologians, when he contrasted the two disciplines:

> Being in part actors in their own religious systems, theologians must *believe*, whereas anthropologists . . . cannot but be *agnostic* if they want to achieve objectivity . . . and objectivity, in the sense of analysis and description that are accepted as valid by reason . . . is, surely, a *sine qua non* for all anthropological scholarship. (1980: vi–vii, emphasis in the original)

Objectivity here implies that anthropologists should study religion as offshoots of various social dynamic structures, power relations, hierarchy, and so on—all in line with Durkheim's ([1912] 1995) sociology of religion. The result, as Gell (1999: 160) pointed out, is that "religion becomes a property of the relations between various elements in the social system, derivable, not from the condition that genuine religious truths exists, but solely from the condition that societies exist" (see also Porpora 2006: 65; Willerslev 2014: 8).

According to this conception, religious discourse is through-and-through symbolic. Any talk about the divine should simply be understood as an oblique way of

referring to social life. As a result, anthropology and theology emerged as two antithetical orientations (Lambek 2012; Robbins 2013: 336; see also Lemons 2016: 142; Scott 2013: 859; and Bialecki, in press, for a discussion): one concerned with religion as symbolic; the other with religion as the genuine existence of divine forces. One seeks to reduce religious faith to sociological knowledge; the other keeps faith alive. One rests on the assumption that reason is by itself sufficient for achieving knowledge about life; the other, accepting the reality of faith, embraces divine revelation (Bourdillon 1980: 4–5; Fortes 1980: x; Willerslev 2014: 8).

Attempts at taking religiosity seriously

While many anthropologists have committed themselves to the principles of methodological atheism, the dichotomy between reason and faith has been brought into question. Talal Asad (2003: 23, 55) launched an attack on religious studies as a field obsessed with notions of belief and faith, notions that in his view should be understood as "secular" techniques, which attained their current importance in the modernist attempt to separate the spiritual from the realm of reason. Similarly, Stanley Tambiah (1990: 4ff.) described how religion was originally "something one felt and did" rather than an option one could choose to believe in (see also Pouillon [1979] 2016). Both Asad and Tambiah link the separation of faith from reason to the Protestant Reformation and the European period of Enlightenment, after which religion as an institution gradually became objectified as a system of ideas with particular histories that could be the object of scientific scrutiny.

While Asad and Tambiah successfully deconstruct the dichotomous antithesis between religion and science, Joel Robbins (2006) has recently taken the discussion a step further by considering the cross-pollinating potential of theology and anthropology. Robbins points in particular to theology's ability to effectively deploy an idea of radical otherness that present-day anthropology has largely lost because, like the rest of the social sciences, it perceives the world in terms of a set model of univocal sameness. Robbins argues that anthropology should take on the challenge set by theology of finding radical otherness at the heart of its endeavor, but should do so without adopting the Christian mythos that underlies theology (292; see also Robbins 2013: 329; Fountain and Lau 2013).

Robbins' call for a theological approach to anthropology is reminiscent of Evans-Pritchard, who in his later years refined his views on magic and religion as he became concerned with mysticism and the transcendental principles shared by Hinduism, Buddhism, and the Abrahamic religions (Barnes 1987; Larsen 2014). Eventually Evans-Pritchard (1965, 1970) came to the conclusion that religious experience is best understood by acknowledging the presence of the divine and the validity of religion in a given culture (Luhrmann 2016: 147).

We wish to take the radical potential of Evans-Pritchard's and Robbins' arguments to a more fundamental level of analysis by considering the theological other not simply as ethnographic data—that is, as a key signifier of particular religious groups who produced it—but, in taking the divine seriously, as a genuine force at the core of our discipline.

In so doing, we also take our inspiration from some of the insights of the ontological turn (Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell 2007; M. A. Pedersen 2011; Viveiros de Castro 2011; Holbraad 2012; Scott 2013), which has advocated taking indigenous cosmologies seriously as the quintessential anthropological move. According to Michael Scott (2013: 895), the anthropology of ontology is in fact a "religious science," an "anthropology of religion *as* religion—a new kind of religious study of religion" in that it is both "an investigative response to wonder and the ethnographic engendering of limitless new wonders" (860; see also da Col 2013: x).

For Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2011), anthropology should take indigenous cosmologies seriously, not as a politically correct gesture of respecting other cultures, but in order to challenge our own ways of thinking. Taking others seriously is thus a thought-provoking exercise which can potentially reveal new insights into the mysteries of life—revelations that Viveiros de Castro (128) terms a "decolonization of thought."

Nevertheless, there seems to be a clear limit to what the ontologists are ready to take seriously (Candea 2011: 147; Astuti 2017; Schielke, n.d.). According to Viveiros de Castro (2011: 133), "almost all of the things that we must not take seriously are near to or inside of us." What cannot be taken seriously includes the very idea of religious "belief" (133). For Viveiros de Castro (143–44), belief is a part of the world of the "Nazis" and the "Western liberal intellectuals," who subscribe to what he calls "suprasensible absolutism"—a dogma which, not unlike Evans-Pritchard's (1976) notion of a closed system of belief, holds that "even if it is false, it is true."

Hence, despite recent attempts by the ontological turn to take religious life seriously, it is clear that only

some forms of religiosity are deemed as worthy. When it comes to religious belief or faith, many contemporary anthropologists stand guard around the professional dogma of "methodological atheism."

Has this dogma blinded us to the nature of faith and the role it plays in anthropological inquiry? What in fact is the relationship between faith, doubt, and critical scholarship? How might we characterize those precarious moments that enable a "decolonization of thought," if not as a matter of both faith and doubt?

Here we attempt to come to terms with the disruptive and transformative moments that often significantly influence the work of anthropologists. We do so by invoking Kierkegaard's "leap of faith," which involves the acceptance of experiences that we cannot hope to understand. We apply Kierkegaard's theological concept as a way to address these experiences that we feel are difficult to conceptualize with the vocabulary of our own discipline. The divine here is the origin of thought, and yet the un-thought of thought (Kierkegaard [1846] 1992). It is, as Robbins (2006) also points out, a form of enigmatic otherness that stirs our passion for thinking and knowing, yet which lies always beyond our conceptual grasp. As anthropologists, we may attempt to analyze and explain the divine, but here we suggest that in many cases it seems to be the inexplicable nature of the divine that ultimately directs our analysis.

Disruptive moments of faith

Anthropology is rich in accounts of how the anthropologist enters the field with insufficient knowledge and becomes witness to mysterious events that cannot be comprehended. Eventually, however, the anthropologist is saved by native others, who provide a path out of ignorance and into the light of native worldviews. Subsequently, what previously appeared strange and exotic can be explained through revisions of anthropological theory. This *rite de passage* is essentially an Enlightenment tale that often constitutes our discipline's source of authority (see Hastrup 1992: 117–18).

But while anthropologists are well trained in analytically taming the mysteries encountered in the field, such encounters may nevertheless continue to haunt them. In his seminal study among the Azande, Evans-Pritchard ([1937] 1976: 18) found it pertinent to denounce the reality of witchcraft: "Witches, as the Azande conceive them, clearly cannot exist." Nevertheless he also found

it necessary to testify to strange experiences of mystical lights outside his hut at night, and to describe the way he regulated himself according to the oracles' decisions, and how he needed at all times to keep poison in his hut (see also Engelke 2002; Viveiros de Castro 2011).

As Timothy Larsen (2014: 111) shows, Azande witchcraft and Nuer religion challenged Evans-Pritchard with unresolvable puzzles about the nature of reality. Even at a later age he continued to revise his views on these cosmologies. While his early work demonstrated how apparently irrational beliefs could make sense and be perfectly rational within their own cultural confines, he later recognized the risk of ascribing to magic and religion the particular rationalities of modern science (see also Winch 1964). Speculating about why, in so many religious traditions, the world is both God and that which hides us from God, he asked: "If all this seems to you and me to be a maze of enigmas, paradoxes, contradictions and delusions it could be that we are unenlightened, that we have not sensed the unity of all things" (Evans-Pritchard 1970: 109).

Evans-Pritchard encountered paradoxes that did not belong to one ontology or the other; neither to him nor to the so-called "natives." These paradoxes apparently shaped his faith and his quest for knowledge. As he recognized, faith is not to be conceived of as blind belief without doubt or critical thought (see also Pelkmans 2013: 6; Tomlinson 2014: 172; Luhrmann 2016: 148). Rather, his faith appeared to develop as a response to the wonders that continued to drive and create puzzles for his thinking.

Let us try to substantiate this claim that anthropological scholarship might be significantly shaped through leaps of faith by considering two experiences from our own fieldwork: the first among indigenous Yukaghir hunters in Siberia (Willerslev 2012), the second among Muslim patients possessed by jinn spirits in Denmark (Suhr 2013).

A dream in the Siberian taiga

During Rane Willerslev's study in the Siberian taiga, he lived for months with the young hunter Ivan in a remote log cabin. The forest proved empty of prey, and consequently the two experienced starvation. In the face of hunger, something happened during Willerslev's nightly dreams:

That night, eerie visions float before my eyes. I am wandering through a dark coniferous forest, much like

the one around us, and arrive at a small, wretched cabin that looks roughly like our own. There is a woman standing in there, whom I can only just make out in the light from the window. Her long black hair falls like wet drapery down over her naked body. She stands completely motionless, pointing at the bunk, where a child is lying swaddled in animal hide. A thin streak of blood seeps from one of the child's eyes. Horrified, I turn my face toward the woman, who takes my hand smilingly and places it on her breast. I feel fatty milk streaming out between my fingers. She presses me tightly against her, greedily pressing her body against mine, smiling all the while. Warmth radiates from her body, and I feel her breath blowing right in my face. Desire courses through me in the form of ravenous hunger. I must penetrate her breast with my mouth, and I topple her over onto the floor, throw myself on top of her, and eagerly suck in the warm, creamy milk. When I get up, she lies lifeless on the floor. Her eyes stare at me, dry and protruding like horns, and not a muscle moves in her face. She is dead. The hunger is still gnawing at my chest, and I start ripping the bloody meat off her bones, eating it more and more greedily. I swallow large chunks without chewing. Completely gorged, I stand up and wipe the blood off my mouth with my shirtsleeve. I look down at the half-eaten human cadaver, and now the shame wells up in me, glowing and brutal. (Willerslev 2012: 94–95)

Waking up, Willerslev had no clear idea what the dream meant, but decided to pull himself together and went hunting. He finally succeeded in shooting a cow moose and its calf. From the cow's udder flowed rich, creamy milk, which he drank. He recognized the resemblance to the previous night's dream. Willerslev and Ivan were saved physically, but spiritually the anthropologist was pushed into a state of bewilderment. Why had the woman and child shown up in his dream? Was he hallucinating because of hunger, or were they real? If so, why were they sacrificing themselves for him so that he and Ivan could live?

Willerslev could not make sense of his experience. He turned to his informant for help, in the hope that "native rationality" might provide an explanation. Ivan simply replied: "I don't know why, but that's the way it is." Ivan turned out to be as ignorant as Willerslev when it came to explaining the coincidence of events. When Willerslev continued to pester his companion with possible explanations, Ivan finally closed the conversation: "One needs to let go of proof, since there is none."

While various traditions of dream interpretation might have suggested different explanations of the dream, for Willerslev it was a confrontation with an inexplicable "paradox" that he could only embrace with a leap of faith (Kierkegaard [1844] 1985: 37; Tomlinson 2014). Willerslev's world turned along a new axis of ambiguity and wonder. As he wrote in his fieldnotes:

> I feel how the foundation of my values has been kicked out from under me. Despite my rationalistic and soberminded ideals, deep in my soul I have been . . . a fool. (Willerslev 2012: 177)

Jinn spirits and madness in Denmark

Christian Suhr's (2013) study of Muslim patients in Denmark undergoing treatment for jinn possession resulted in a similar fundamental sense of not-knowing and being at a loss to form a judgment. The collapse of what Suhr had thought to be the proper causes and effects of possession intensified as he himself started to hear the manipulative whispers of jinn and had to protect himself.

> With all my weight I try to keep Feisal's hand down. More than twenty-six jinn have been hiding in his body. Now the jinn, Amir, has gone into Feisal again. Amir tries to protect himself by making the sign of the cross with his hand against the verses of the Qur'an being recited by the exorcist. I force Feisal's hand down to the floor, but he is strong. When Feisal still lived in Bosnia he was a karate master. The exorcist reads louder. Feisal's feet shake wildly, his fingers stretched out in shifting gestures and signs, the head rolling from side to side, and his eyes staring wildly at the ceiling. The muscles in his belly and legs contract in odd ways as if being beaten from the inside. The whole thing has been going on for around half an hour. When the exorcist first started to recite the Qur'an, a Bosnian jinn appeared, but when it finally gave up and left the body, it was immediately replaced by Amir. Amir speaks Arabic in a deep guttural voice. This has happened at previous exorcisms as well, but it continues to shock me, because Feisal does not speak Arabic. The secular rational analyst in me immediately starts to produce possible explanations: this is something Feisal has learned; he has watched it on YouTube and now performs it for us; he is unconsciously faking this possession to attract attention to his suffering; or, as I once heard, certain states of consciousness may in fact open up to passive languages hidden deep within our brains. At the same

time my mind spins with suspicion, I keep reciting a supplication from the Qur'an for protection. My body shakes when Amir looks at me through Feisal's eyes. I know I must not fear the jinn. When people start to fear, they get caught. Feisal returns to consciousness. The spasms continue but at a slower pace. Previously he'd told me he wasn't sure whether his possession was caused by black magic or if it was a deception caused by his own mind. "I don't know what happens to me," he says, "subḥān Allah, this is the will of God."

Faith in God for Feisal became possible as he moved through continued states of resignation and gave up seeking an explanation for why he had become a victim of possession, and even whether the many spirits occupying his body were in fact a construction of his own imagination. For Feisal, healing resulted from his unconditional submission to the unknowable will of God (see Suhr 2013, 2015). Suhr's fieldwork realigned itself around the lack of certainty and knowledge that was also a fundamental and defining part of Feisal's encounter with jinn and madness. Forced as he was to accept the impossibility of understanding the power of God in healing, Suhr could come to share the faith of his interlocutors—a faith that, as Kierkegaard describes, "cannot be proved, demonstrated, comprehended, for the link which makes a linking together possible is missing, and what else does this say than that it is a paradox" (Kierkegaard in Ferreira 1998: 228).

The fear of going native

Jean Pouillon ([1979] 2016, 485) points out how the expression "I believe" (*je crois*) in French as well as in English and other European languages paradoxically expresses both doubt and assurance. To explicitly state that "I believe" affirms the existence of something, but also indicates that it might be possible to doubt it (see also Lindquist and Coleman 2008: 6). Pouillon ([1979] 2016: 491) argues that this ambiguity, the doubt at the heart of the conviction, is a peculiar characteristic of religions such as Christianity and Islam that are based on the revelation of a supernatural world of spiritual powers. By contrast, Pouillon studied the Dangaleat in Chad, who, he argues, do not conceive of the presence of invisible *margaï* spirits as a supernatural force. Hence the Dangaleat have "no more need to

believe in [*croire à*] the *margaï* than to believe that if you throw a stone it will fall" (490).

Like Asad and Tambiah, Pouillon warns against making quick assumptions about the universality of Western ideas about religious belief by distinguishing between those religious traditions founded on the revelation of a supernatural world and those that are not. Pointing out how the concepts drawn by anthropologists from their own culture often do not match the ideas and actions they are used to interpret, Malcolm Ruel (1982: 22) concludes in a similar line of argument that there is "little evidence that there is anything equivalent to Christian Belief in other world religions" (see also Needham 1972: 188). While we certainly should not assume that the same experiences of religious belief are shared across religious and cultural divides, we should also be skeptical about assuming that other people's religious experience are necessarily and inherently different (see also Grottanelli 1994; Lindquist and Coleman 2008; Bandak and Boylston 2014).

In both Ruel's and Pouillon's work, "belief," in the sense of "putting one's faith in" or "trusting" in moments where doubt could also be a possibility, is indeed identified across the different religious traditions they describe. Pouillon ([1979] 2016: 491) examines the different words used by the Dangaleat to describe how "one takes aim within uncertainty. One can only estimate what each *margaï* desires . . . one serves the *margaï*, one trusts in them . . . one knows from experience that they exist, and one tries to guess their intentions." While the word "belief" may be used to assert one's convictions or acceptance of something—as when testifying to one's belief in the resurrection of Jesus as a historical fact—Ruel (1982: 11–12) examines how the English word originally derives from the Greek word *pistis*, which was used to express trust, faith, or confidence in other people or in the gods. This is the kind of faith with which Kierkegaard was also concerned: the challenge of putting confidence in, trusting, and having faith in the face of uncertainty and doubt.

In our fieldwork with Siberian hunters and Muslim exorcists, existential doubt was not simply something that overtook us in the field; it also seemed a fundamental part of our interlocutors' experiences, and we are by no means the only anthropologists to have shared such unsettling experiences of doubt and faith with our interlocutors (see, e.g., Stoller 1984; Harding 1987; Mitchell 1997; Luhrmann 2012; Fountain and Lau 2013; Pelkmans 2013; Larsen 2014).

Amira Mittermaier had a similar revelation when studying a community of Sufi dreamers in Cairo. The disruptive and decentering effects of her own dreams during fieldwork forced her to consider the possibility that her research project and her field encounters were not simply a result of her own planning or mere chance, but might be better "understood in relation to divinely ordained fate, orders that are not easily perceived by the human mind, the guidance of a 'hidden hand'" (Mittermaier 2012: 261). Here too, faith in God is suggested as a possible response to that which lies beyond human explanation.

Recently Nils Bubandt has described something similar in his encounter with witchcraft in Bulo, Indonesia. He recalls his experience of hearing the sound of a dog chewing on a bone coming from the roof of his house: "This was impossible. Dogs cannot climb vertical slopes. Besides, the house had a sago-leaf roof, and a dog would fall straight through it, even if it managed to climb up there" (Bubandt 2014: x). Was this an instance of witchcraft? When Bubandt appealed to his informants for an explanation, it turned out that they had no secure knowledge of what witchcraft is. This insight led Bubandt to consider witchcraft in a new light: rather than witchcraft providing an explanation, here it marks the *limit* of explanation. Witchcraft is fundamentally infused with existential doubt: basically no one—not even the witches—knows what witchcraft is (Bubandt 2014: 55; 2016: 519; see also Favret-Saada 1980: 15ff.). Bubandt uses this crucial insight to propose a theoretical argument in which doubt appears to replace belief. But as Webb Keane (2016: 507) points out, Bubandt's ethnography reveals in a more nuanced way how in fact various degrees of doubt operate simultaneously with various degrees of belief: "half beliefs, occasional beliefs, confused beliefs, contradictory beliefs, fingers-crossed beliefs."

This continuous condition of wondering, doubting, attempting to believe but without achieving any definite answers we also find in an intriguing passage from the travelogue of the famous Danish polar explorer Knud Rasmussen (1925: 330ff.; K. Pedersen 2014). Over several evenings, Rasmussen discussed taboos with the Inuit shaman Aua, but without discovering anything more than a long list of taboo items. Whenever Rasmussen asked the question *why?*, Aua gave no answer. Finally Aua stood and dragged Rasmussen outside the dwelling. He pointed to a series of concrete instances of suffering: a starving child, a sick woman, tired and empty-handed hunters returning to camp. In each case,

Aua challenged Rasmussen to answer the rhetorical question: Why all this undeserved suffering? Rasmussen, like his Inuit host, was unable to give a meaningful answer. Then Aua said: "You see. Even you cannot give any reasons when we ask you why life is as it is. And that's the way it has to be. All our customs come from life and go to life; we explain nothing."

What would it mean to take such statements seriously? There has been much debate around the risk of fieldworkers becoming entirely consumed by the cultural and religious beliefs of their informants—a supposedly dreadful situation, in which the anthropologist loses her or his sense of scholarly distance and "goes native." This seems to us a decidedly misplaced fear. Not even the informants of anthropologists conform to such fetishized constructions of the "native." Nevertheless, a few anthropologists have argued that in fact we do need to go native in order to truly grasp what our informants are telling us.

Edith Turner (1992: 148–49) provides us with an eloquent example of this when she reports seeing a real spirit emerge from her informant's back during fieldwork in Zambia:

> I saw with my own eyes a large thing emerging out of the flesh of her back. It was a big gray sphere—a sort of plasm—about six inches across, dark and opaque. I was amazed—delighted. I still laugh with the glee at the realization of having seen it, the Ihamba spirit, and so big!

For Turner the question is not the objective existence of these spirits. If we cannot see them, she argues, it is simply because we do not dare to see them, a kind of positivist denial fueled by our academic anxieties about going native (Turner 1993: 9, see also Stoller 1984: 93; Mittermaier 2011: 89). In her view, "going native" is the only proper response to "ecstatic" experiences such as the one described above:

> In ordinary life anywhere, the same thing crops up—among Baptists, rabbis, in the streets of Calcutta, in Lhasa, Tibet, and in the midst of a Sufi prayer meeting. According to the angry old guard of anthropology—which is still here—they're all supposed to be wrong; you should ignore their experience, which never happened anyway. . . . There are spirits, and we have no business contradicting so many good people around the world. (Turner 2006: 44–46)

On this matter, Viveiros de Castro (2011) appears to be in line with Turner. With regard to the visionary experiences of the indigenous Amazonians, he states: "Anthropologists must allow that 'visions' are not beliefs, not consensual views, but rather worlds seen objectively: not worldviews, but worlds of vision" (Viveiros de Castro 2011: 133).

While we admire the passion with which Turner and Viveiros de Castro have embraced the task of taking indigenous cosmologies seriously, other ethnographic accounts suggest that doubt is often an intractable part of the ways many people experience, interact with, and believe in so-called "spiritual" phenomena (see, e.g., Bloch 2013; A. E. Rasmussen 2016). The Siberian hunters, for example, are by no means naïve animists in the sense that they faithfully believe everything their myths and dreams tell them about the existence of spirits (Willerslev 2013). Likewise for the Muslim patients and exorcists who constantly call the truth value of their diagnoses and means of healing into question (Suhr 2013, 2015).

To simply state that there are spirits, that God exists, or that extraordinary "visions" are not beliefs but "worlds of vision," is not very different from denying that such things exist (see also Larsen 2014: 205–6). Both of these apparently contradictory statements share the assumption that the mysteries of life can in fact be intellectually grasped. This rational undercurrent is built into much of the so-called "anthropology of ontology." As Scott points out:

> [The anthropology of ontology] could be read, in fact, as suggesting that anthropology is a special vocation to *aporia*, almost a quest for *aporia* as the sign that one has encountered alterity at the limits of one's conceptual resources. Once induced, however, the *aporia* of alterity should be resolved by allowing its impact to help us generate new concepts rather than by applying inadequate concepts that can only represent others as afflicted by "an epistemic teratology—error, illusion, madness, ideology." (Scott 2013: 865)

In this "openness" toward new conceptual thinking, Scott locates a religious gesture. However, in our view, something is lost in this insistence on resolving alterity through the creation of alternative rationalities, rather than embracing alterity as such. This is exactly what makes the ontological turn depart from uncertainties integral to many experiences of religious faith. While much debate within the ontological turn has concerned itself with anthropology's capacity to apply alien concepts to conjure and create entirely new worlds of conceptual thought, what strikes us is the uniformity of the logic with which so-called "multiontological" analysis is often forged (see also Candea 2011: 149).

The unsettling stories of anthropologists' encounters with inexplicable phenomena of a religious nature reveal something other than the anthropological axiom of taking up the native's point of view, as the viewpoints of the so-called "natives" are often equally empty of explanation. The fact that no answers are given may not simply be a matter of asking the wrong questions. Perhaps there are certain questions that cannot be answered because they deal with paradoxes which lie beyond reason, outside the limits of rational thinking; paradoxes that produce a type of existential uncertainty that belongs neither to oneself nor to the ethnographic other, but entirely subsumes them both. For Kierkegaard, the dismantling of our certainties through the encounter with such paradoxes "that understanding cannot answer" is an integral and indispensable part of faith (Howland 2008: 103). Regardless of whether anthropologists share the same paradoxes as their informants, it appears to us that the leaps of faith provoked in the encounter with such paradoxes are crucial to the way many anthropological insights emerge. How are such leaps of faith useful to the project of anthropology?

Socratic living and anthropology

Before we can answer this question, a slight detour into the history of philosophy is called for, one that serves to question the canonical opposition between reason and faith. Who better to bring into the discussion than Socrates, "the hypertrophy of the logical faculty" (Nietzsche [1889] 2004: 475)? A number of nineteenth- and twentieth-century philosophers, including Friedrich Nietzsche (11–14) and Martin Heidegger (see Dostal 1985), have painted authoritative images of Socrates' quest for knowledge as initiating the triumph of reason, the ultimate results of which can today be seen in the unlimited ambition of the natural sciences to uncover the mysteries of life through rationalistic causal explanations. However, as Jacob Howland (2008) points out in his book on Kierkegaard and Socrates, Kierkegaard discerned in Socrates' speeches and deeds a very different kind of thinker. Far from being an arrogant advocate of reason, Kierkegaard's Socrates realized the lim-

its of reason to the point where he opened himself up to religious faith.

In Socrates' philosophy, "ignorance" is central. When the oracle in Delphi announced that "No one is wiser than Socrates," he interpreted this to mean his acknowledgment that "I know that I know nothing." Kierkegaard pointed out that this stance of ignorance is true only because Socrates was true to it by *living it*: "Theory and practice in [Socrates] were in harmony" (Kierkegaard in Howland 2008: 15). In other words, to be a Socratic thinker is not to produce abstract philosophical doctrines, but to live them. Socratic thinking, therefore, is not a theoretical doctrine, but a practical one.

This reverberates with the anthropological call for lived fieldwork: "The anthropologist must get out of his comfortable position in the long chair and live it," Malinowski (1926: 126) declared: "Only by living a way of life can he get . . . [an] account of it without falsification" (Jarvie [1964] 1984: 3). In other words, anthropological analysis rests on the anthropologist's willingness to live ethnographically. This personal commitment to existential transformation of the self is as essential to the anthropological project as it was to Socrates.

The analogy between Socratic living and ethnographic fieldwork can be taken a step further. Socrates saw himself as "nothing more than a midwife of thoughts [who] had no learning to offer" (Howland 2008: 40). He spent his time hanging out with his interlocutors in the *agora* and engaged with them in dialogue. Likewise with anthropologists, who go out into the field and mingle with people, not to call to mind what they already know or to fill their informants' minds with their own knowledge, but to understand another way of life by letting themselves be taken in by it to a point at which their existence may well be transformed by it. The 1980s "writing culture debate" brought attention to this crucial aspect of ethnographic practice (Clifford and Marcus 1986). The "ethnographer's magic," as Kirsten Hastrup (1992: 118) pointed out, "is part of the plot; her achievement is not 'pure production' *ex nihilo*. . . . There is no way of eliminating our consciousness from our activities in the field; it is part of reality" (see also Hastrup and Hervik 2013).

This must also be what Viveiros de Castro (2011: 128) means to suggest when he talks about the anthropological endeavor as a "decolonization of thought." Anthropology is fundamentally a confrontation with alterity, and one that pushes our thinking to the very limits of its conceptual reserves. Holbraad (2012: 251) aptly uses the Socratic term "aporia," which signifies the feeling of being at a loss that arises when our thinking confronts apparently absurd paradoxes. However, taking this insight seriously would demand we accept the paradox, rather than attempt to resolve it through multiontological explanations.

What is the underlying drive of the engagement with alterity, this search for new wisdom that necessitates self-transformation? According to Kierkegaard's Socrates, it is situated in passion, in eros. Socratic thinking is not merely an intellectual exercise, but a passionate activity: "Driven by eros, and with an eye toward a truth that is always beyond his grasp, he [Socrates] lives in dialogue with others and in engagement with the life of his community" (Howland 2008: 77). A more apt depiction of the ethnographic endeavor is hard to find. But how are we to understand the nature of eros, the very force behind the quest for wisdom? For Socrates— and this is a key point—eros is not reducible to human desire alone, but has both human and divine origins. "It is a daimonic or intermediate passion that binds the human with the divine and the self with that which transcends it" (59). The eros of Kierkegaard's Socrates, therefore, is inseparable from that which is divine, and so the quest for wisdom involves not only reason but also faith.

Divine revelation and anthropological knowledge

Kierkegaard's Socrates comes to realize that knowledge about life is ultimately rooted in divinity; so, to embrace the source of knowledge, he has to take a leap of faith. In anthropology we find an equivalent figure in Claude Lévi-Strauss, who, like Socrates, believed in the power of rationality, but also came to acknowledge that the source of his thinking relied upon an impersonal, extrahuman force. Recounting the production of his massive corpus of text, the so-called "father of structuralism" denied that his authorship could be attributed to his own ability to perceive, master, and bring order to the material collected in the field. Instead he saw his thinking as the operation of myth by myth, or a kind of "myth of myths."

> It is hard for me to perceive myself as a person, as an "I."
> I am a site where certain things happen in a transitory manner. Thought is like water passing through a sieve that completely escapes me. I can't recuperate memories of my past . . . the ethnologist in his office trying to be a

place where foreign thoughts develop . . . this infirmity of my nature makes me almost a passive place since I don't control what happens, almost a passive site of phenomena that don't belong to my own existence, to my own history, or my social milieu. (Lévi-Strauss in Marcus 2013: 302)

What Lévi-Strauss ([1964] 1983: 12) came to realize was "not how men think in myths, but how myths operate in men's minds without their being aware of the fact." Indeed, he argued that "perhaps [it would] be better to go still further and, disregarding the thinking subject completely, proceed as if the thinking process were taking place in the myths, in their reflection upon themselves and their interrelation" (12).

For modern, secular, free-thinking anthropologists, Lévi-Strauss' denial of authorship might seem ethically dubious, even irresponsible. While Lévi-Strauss never surrendered himself to religious faith, Stanley Diamond (1974: 315) writes that "Lévi-Strauss emerges as a type of religious and philosophical thinker, a theologian in spite of himself." The transformative experience described by Lévi-Strauss is rooted in eros, in the passion for knowledge, in the capacity to be moved by something beyond oneself as thinking reaches its limit. At this moment of embracing the paradox, the thinker is forced to leave any rationality behind and simply "let go" (Kierkegaard [1844] 1985: 42–43). Socrates—and Lévi-Strauss, we would add—achieved this by rigorously cultivating the passion for knowledge up to the point where he was "forced . . . to admit the intractable mystery to which eros opens him up . . . a path to faith . . . in which one's own agency becomes indistinguishable from action on the part of the divine" (Howland 2008: 5).

This view entails a distinctly different take on knowledge. Rather than conceiving of anthropological knowledge as merely produced or constructed, we propose, with Socrates and Lévi-Strauss, that it also involves a kind of revelation over which we have little to no power. Paraphrasing the philosopher Gilles Deleuze in his brief reflection on the Kierkegaardian paradox of faith in life, we suggest that anthropology advances not only by virtue of power of thought, but by its "*impower*"—that is, "the impossibility of thinking that is thought" (Deleuze [1989] 2005: 161). Insights into life do not merely originate in what we conventionally regard as the anthropologist's intellect or determination, but from passion, eros, the ability to be moved by something outside the self: the so-called "divine" that is the very foundation of faith.

Conclusion

The "divine," "divinity," "God," are words that are at the center of the anthropology of religion. While these are frequently treated as emic concepts that constitute objects of study, they are rarely treated as active agents in the production of anthropological knowledge (see Mittermaier 2011; Schielke, n.d.). For some anthropologists, perhaps, it is simply assumed, with Nietzsche's famous phrase, that "God is dead"—and that therefore it is no longer necessary to attend carefully to this concept (cf. Fiorenza and Kaufman 1998: 136). But the divine continues to have an enormous importance not only to large numbers of religious believers, but also to a great many theologians and philosophers (e.g., Milbank 1990; Marion 1991; Derrida 2002). As argued by Robbins (2006), concepts such as God and the divine offer ways of speaking about the form of otherness that directs anthropological inquiry: an inquiry which, as we have pointed out, can never simply be either a gathering of data from informants or a product of our own intellectual mastery. Attending to otherness in this radical sense implies an acceptance of the condition for knowledge as something that is "given" through what Kierkegaard calls a "leap of faith." As emphasized by Mittermaier's (2012: 261) Sufi dreamers in Cairo, Bubandt's (2014) witches, Knud Rasmussen's (1925) Inuit shaman, and the Siberian hunters and Muslim patients and healers whom we ourselves encountered, knowledge depends not only on the actions we take, but, equally importantly, on our ability to receive.

The forms of faith that we have discussed here appear to be inseparable from existential uncertainty. When the weight and pressure of the inexplicable are closing in on us, it becomes impossible to stay secure in a consistent worldview. We need such moments of existential anxiety, because they produce the form of doubt that is essential if one is to open oneself to new knowledge. Faith is not about certainty or the elimination of doubt. Instead faith is the exercise of holding these opposites in tension: not by resolving them into a rational synthesis, but by maintaining their incompatibility. "Letting go" in faith involves embracing these tensions, which is what constitutes the absurdity of the paradox. This is the anxiety-provoking task of the religious person and the anthropologist alike. This is why both embody paradox.

It follows that the task of the anthropologist is not really "taking things seriously" (Viveiros de Castro 2011), but not taking things *too* seriously. Indeed, not taking things too seriously, and especially not taking one's own

perspective too seriously, is often what our informants would advise, especially with regard to such matters as divine truth, faith, and religion (Lévi-Strauss [1963] 1993; Suhr 2013: 67; Willerslev 2013). Kierkegaard argued fiercely against the church as an institutionalization of divine truth in much the same way as we need to hold out against the desire of anthropological theory to rationally explain, grasp, and completely disclose the intractable mysteries of otherness. Anthropological insight, we suggest, is received from a decidedly unprivileged position in the face of the divine.

Acknowledgments

References

Antony, Louise M. 2007. "Introduction." In *Philosophers without gods*: *Meditations on atheism and the secular life*, edited by Louise M. Antony, ix–xiv. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Asad, Talal. 2003. *Formations of the secular: Christianity, Islam, modernity*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Astuti, Rita. 2017. "Taking people seriously." Hau: *Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 7 (1): 105–22.

Bandak, Andreas, and Tom Boylston. 2014. "The 'orthodoxy' of orthodoxy: On moral imperfection, correctness, and deferral in religious worlds." *Religion and Society: Advances in Research* 5 (1): 25–46.

Barbour, Ian. 2013. *When science meets religion: Enemies*, *strangers*, *or partners*. San Francisco: HarperCollins.

Barnes, John A. 1987. "Edward Evan Evans-Pritchard, 1902–1973." *Proceedings of the British Academy* LXXIII, 447–90.

Berger, Peter. 1967. *The social reality of religion*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Bialecki, Jon. In press. "Anthropology, theology, and the problem of incommensurability." In *Theologically engaged anthropology*, edited by J. Derrick Lemons. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Blanes, Ruy Llera, and Galina Oustinova-Stjepanovic. 2015. "Godless people, doubt, and atheism: Introduction." *Social Analysis* 59 (2): 1–19.

Bloch, Maurice. 2013. "Types of shared doubt in the flow of a discussion." In *Ethnographies of doubt*, edited by Mathijs Pelkmans, 43–58. London: I. B. Tauris.

Bourdillon, M. F. C. 1980. "Introduction." In *Sacrifice*, edited by M. F. C. Bourdillon and Meyer Fortes, 1–28. London: Academic Press for the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland.

Bubandt, Nils. 2014. *The empty seashell: Witchcraft and doubt on an Indonesian island*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

———. 2016. "When in doubt . . . ? A reply." Hau: *Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 6 (1): 519–30.

Candea, Matei. 2011. "Endo/exo." *Common Knowledge* 17 (1): 146–50.

Cannell, Fenella. 2005. "The Christianity of anthropology." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (N.S.) 11 (2): 335–56.

Clifford, James, and George E. Marcus, eds. 1986. *Writing culture*: *The poetics and politics of ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Corduan, Winfried. 2013. *In the beginning God: A fresh look at the case of original monotheism*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group.

da Col, Giovanni. 2013. "Strathern bottle: On topology, ethnographic theory, and the method of wonder." In *Learning to see in Melanesia*, Marilyn Strathern, vii–xvi. Masterclass Series 2. Manchester: Hau Society for Ethnographic Theory.

Dawkins, Richard. 2006. *The God delusion*. London: Bantam Press.

Deleuze, Gilles. (1989) 2005. *Cinema 2*: *The time-image*. Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta. London: Continuum.

Derrida, Jacques. 2002. *Acts of religion*. New York: Psychology Press.

Diamond, Stanley. 1974. "The myth of structuralism." In *The unconscious in culture*: *The structuralism of Claude Lévi-Strauss in perspective*, edited by Ino Rossi, 292–335. New York: E. P. Dutton.

Dostal, Robert, J. 1985. "Beyond being: Heidegger's Plato." *Journal of History of Philosophy* 23 (1): 71–98.

Durkheim, Émile. (1912) 1995. *The elementary forms of religious life*. Translated by Karen E. Fields. New York: Free Press.

Engelke, Matthew. 2002. "The problem of belief: Evans-Pritchard and Victor Turner on 'the inner life'." *Anthropology Today* 18 (6): 3–8.

Evans-Pritchard, E. E. (1936) 1976. *Witchcraft, oracles, and magic among the Azande*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

———. 1965. *Theories of primitive religion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

———. 1970. "Some reflections on mysticism." *DYN* 1: 99–116.

Favret-Saada, Jeanne. 1980. *Deadly words: Witchcraft in the Bocage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ferreira, Jamie M. 1998. "Faith and the Kierkegaardian leap." In *The Cambridge companion to Kierkegaard*, edited by Alastair Hannay and Gordon D. Marino, 207–34. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Fiorenza, Francis S. and Gordon D. Kaufman. 1998. "God." In *Critical terms for religious studies*, edited by Mark C. Taylor, 136–59. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Fortes, Meyer. 1980. "Preface: Anthropologists and theologians: Common interests and divergent approaches." In *Sacrifice*, edited by M. F. C. Bourdillon and Meyer Fortes, v–xix. London: Academic Press for the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland.

Fountain, Philip, and Sin Wen Lau. 2013. "Anthropological theologies: Engagements and encounters." *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 24 (3): 227–34.

Frazer, James G. (1911) 1959. *The golden bough: A study in magic and religion*. London: Macmillan.

Gell, Alfred. 1999. "The technology of enchantment and the enchantment of technology." In *The art of anthropology: Essays and diagrams*, edited by Eric Hirsch, 159–86. London: The Athlone Press.

Grottanelli, Cristiano. 1994. "Notes on the history of credence." In *The notion of religion in comparative research*, edited by Ugo Bianchi, 667–74. Rome: "L'Erma" di Bretschneider.

Harding, Susan. 1987. "Convicted by the Holy Spirit: The rhetoric of fundamental Baptist conversion." *American Ethnologist* 14 (1): 167–81.

Hastrup, Kirsten 1992. "Writing ethnography: State of the art." In *Anthropology and autobiography*, edited by Judith Okely and Helen Callaway, 116–33. London: Routledge.

Hastrup, Kirsten, and Peter Hervik, eds. 2013. *Social experience and anthropological knowledge*. London: Routledge.

Henare, Amiria, Martin Holbraad, and Sari Wastell. 2007. "Introduction." In *Thinking through things: Theorising artefacts ethnographically*, edited by Amiria Henare, Martin Holbraad, and Sari Wastell, 1–31. London: Routledge.

Holbraad, Martin. 2012. *Truth in motion: The recursive anthropology of Cuban divination*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Howell, Brian M. 2007. "The repugnant cultural other speaks back: Christian identity as ethnographic standpoint." *Anthropological Theory* 7 (4): 371–91.

Howland, Jacob. 2008. *Kierkegaard and Socrates: A study in philosophy and faith*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Jarvie, I. C. (1964) 1984. *The revolution in anthropology*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Kierkegaard, Søren. (1843) 2005. *Fear and trembling*. Translated by Alastair Hannay. London: Penguin.

———. (1844) 1985. *Philosophical fragments*. Edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Eda H. Hong. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

———. (1846) 1992. *Concluding unscientific postscript to philosophical fragments*. Translated by Howard V. Hong and Eda H. Hong. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Keane, Webb. 2016. "If people don't know themselves, can they inhabit an ontology?" Hau: *Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 6 (1): 506–9.

Lambek, Michael. 2012. "Facing religion, from anthropology." *Anthropology of This Century* 4. http://aotcpress.com/articles/facing-religion-anthropology/.

Larsen, Timothy. 2014. *The slain God: Anthropologists and the Christian faith*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lemons, J. Derrick. 2016. "The slain resurrected God: A reconsideration of anthropologists and the Christian faith." In "Faith in anthropology: A symposium on Timothy Larsen's *The slain God*," Brian Howell et al. *The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology* 34 (2): 141–43.

Lennox, John C. 2011. *God and Stephen Hawking: Whose design is it anyway?* Oxford: Lion Hudson plc.

Lévi-Strauss, Claude. (1963) 1993. "The sorcerer and his magic." In *Magic, witchcraft, and religion: An anthropological study of the supernatural*, edited by Arthur C. Lehmann and James E. Myers, 169–78. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing Company.

———. (1964) 1983. *The raw and the cooked*: *Mythologiques*, vol. 1. Translated by John and Doreen Weightman. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lindquist, Galina, and Simon Coleman. 2008. "Introduction: Against belief?" *Social Analysis* 52 (1): 1–18.

Luhrmann, T. M. 2012. *When God talks back: Understanding the American evangelical relationship with God*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

———. 2016. "Understanding the work of faith." In "Faith in anthropology: A symposium on Timothy Larsen's *The slain God*," Brian Howell et al. *The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology* 34 (2): 147–49.

Malinowski, Bronislaw. 1926. *Myth in primitive psychology*. London: Kegan Paul.

Marcus, George E. 2013. "The traffic in montage, then and now." In *Transcultural montage*, edited by Christian Suhr and Rane Willerslev, 302–7. New York: Berghahn.

Marion, Jean-Luc 1991. *God without being*. Translated by Thomas A. Carson. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

McGhee, Michael. 2009. "Introduction." In *Philosophers and God*: *At the frontiers of faith and reason*, edited by John Cornwell and Michael McGhee, xvii–xxvii. London: Continuum.

Milbank, John 1990. *Theology and social theory: Beyond secular reason*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Mitchell, Jon P. 1997. "A moment with Christ: The importance of feelings in the analysis of belief." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (N.S.) 3 (1): 79–94.

Mittermaier, Amira. 2011. *Dreams that matter: Egyptian landscapes of the imagination*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

———. 2012. "Dreams from elsewhere: Muslim subjectivities beyond the trope of self-cultivation." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (N.S.) 18 (2): 247–65.

Needham, Rodney. 1972. *Belief, language, and experience*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Nietzsche, Fredrich. (1889) 2004. *Twilight of the idols and the antichrist*. New York: Dover Publications Inc.

Pedersen, Kennet. 2014. "Hvorfor, hvorfor—den udelukkende, eller indelukkede tredje antropologiske mulighed. En overvejelse over den tidligere angakkoq Auas "demonstration" over for Knud Rasmussen [Why, why—the external or internal third anthropological possibility. A reflection on the former Angakkoq Aua's "Demonstration" in response to Knud Rasmussen]." *Grønlandsk Kultur og Samfund. Forskning 2013–14*, vol. 1: 145–62.

Pedersen, Morten. A. 2011. *Not quite shamans: Spirit worlds and political lives in northern Mongolia*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Pelkmans, Mathijs. 2013. "Outline for an ethnography of doubt." In *Ethnographies of doubt*, edited by Mathijs Pelkmans, 1–42. London: I. B. Tauris.

Porpora, Douglas V. 2006. "Methodological atheism, methodological agnosticism and religious experience." *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 36 (1): 57–75.

Pouillon, Jean. (1979) 2016. "Remarks on the verb 'to believe'." Hau: *Journal of Anthropological Theory* 6 (3): 485–92.

Rasmussen, Anders Emil. 2016. "Doubting the dead: Approximations of passing in a Papua New Guinean community." In *Materialities of passing*, edited by Peter Bjerregaard, Anders Emil Rasmussen, and Tim Flohr Sørensen, 131–46. London: Routledge.

Rasmussen, Knud. 1925. *Fra Grønland til Stillehavet*: *Rejser og Mennesker fra 5. Thule-Ekspedition* [*From Greenland to the Pacific: Travel and people from the 5th Thule expedition*]. Copenhagen: Gyldendal.

Riexinger, Martin Thomas. 2008. "Propagating Islamic creationism on the internet." *Masaryk University Journal of Law and Technology* 2 (2): 99–112.

Robbins, Joel. 2006. "Anthropology and theology: An awkward relationship?" *Anthropological Quarterly* 79 (2): 285–94.

———. 2013. "Let's keep it awkward: Anthropology, theology, and otherness." *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 24 (3): 329–37.

———. 2015. "Purity and danger: The curious case of Christianity in the history of anthropology." *Books and Culture: A Christian Review* 21 (4). http:// http://www.booksandculture.com/articles/2015/julaug/purity-and-danger.html.

Ruel, Malcolm. 1982. "Christians as believers." In *Religious organization and religious experience*, edited by J. Davis, 9–31. London: Academic Press.

Schielke, Samuli. N.d. "The power of God." Unpublished conference presentation.

Scott, Michael W. 2013. "What I'm reading: The anthropology of ontology (religious science?)" *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (N.S.) 19 (4): 859–72.

Shaunfield, Wallace S. 2013. *God exists! Ten evidences for belief*. Boerne, TX: Nealhas Publishers.

Stoller, Paul. 1984. "Eye, mind and word in anthropology." *L'Homme* 24: 91–114.

Suhr, Christian. 2013. "Descending with angels: The invisible in Danish psychiatry and Islamic exorcism." Ph.D. thesis, School of Culture and Society, Aarhus University.

———. 2015. "The failed image and the possessed." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Society* (N.S.) 21 (S1): 96–112.

Tambiah, Stanley Jeyaraya. 1990. *Magic, science, religion, and the scope of rationality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Tomlinson, Matt. 2014. "Bringing Kierkegaard into anthropology: Repetition, absurdity, and curses in Fiji." *American Ethnologist* 41 (1): 163–75.

Turner, Edith. 1992. *Experiencing ritual: A new interpretation of African healing*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

———. 1993. "The reality of spirits: A tabooed or permitted field of study." *Anthropology of Consciousness* 4(1): 9–12.

———. 2006. "Advances in the study of spirit experience: Drawing together many threads." *Anthropology of Consciousness* 17 (2): 33–61.

Tylor, E. B. (1871) 1958. *Primitive culture: Researches into the development of mythology, philosophy, religion, language, art, and custom*. London: John Murray.

Viveiros de Castro, Eduardo. 2011. "Zeno and the art of anthropology: Of lies, beliefs, paradoxes, and other truths." *Common Knowledge* 17 (1): 128–45.

Willerslev, Rane. 2012. *On the run in Siberia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

———. 2013. "Taking animism seriously, but perhaps not too seriously?" *Religion and Society* 4: 41–57.

———. 2014. "Have faith!" *Kula Kula: Sosialantropologisk Tidsskrift* (1): 8–11.

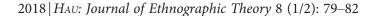Winch, Peter. 1964. "Understanding a primitive society." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 1 (4): 307–24.

Rane WILLERSLEV is Director of the National Museum of Denmark. He has his Ph.D. from the University of Cambridge (2003) and is the author of *Soul hunters: Hunting, animism, and personhood among the Siberian Yukaghirs* (University of California Press, 2007), *On the run in Siberia* (University of Minnesota Press, 2012), and a number of articles and edited volumes, many of which are about the spiritual cosmologies of Siberia's indigenous peoples.

Rane Willerslev
The National Museum of Denmark
Frederiksholms Kanal 12, 1220 Copenhagen K, Denmark
Rane.Willerslev@natmus.dk

Christian SUHR is Assistant Professor and coordinator of the Eye & Mind Laboratory for Visual Anthropology at Aarhus University. He has directed three award-winning films (*Descending with angels* [DER, 2013]; *Unity through culture* [DER, 2011]; and *Ngat is dead* [DER, 2009]) and is the coeditor of *Transcultural montage* (Berghahn, 2013, with Rane Willerslev) and two special issues entitled "Camera as cultural critique" (*Journal of Visual Anthropology*, in press) and "*Al-Ghayb*: The poetics and politics of the unseen in Islam" (*Journal of Contemporary Islam*, 2017).

Christian Suhr
Department of Anthropology, Aarhus University
Moesgård Allé 20, 8270 Højbjerg, Denmark
suhr@cas.au.dk

REJOINDER

The real ontological challenge

T. M. Luhrmann, *Stanford University*

Anthropologists have a problem with God

Anthropology has always been about radical otherness. The discipline is about difference: we study what are not our customs, not our morals, not our beliefs. The field was born in the discovery that the expectations we took to be universal were merely local. As Ruth Benedict (1934) so compellingly put it, "normal" is never absolute but always relative to some group's understanding of what is good. Back in the beginning, anthropologists set out to find societies that upended their own expectations about marrying, parenting, inheriting, acquiring, judging, ruling, and believing. Behind those goals was always—at least in the beginning—the idea that understanding these differences might lead us to a better appreciation of our own expectations, and possibly give us the ability to change them. Benedict's explicit aim in her famous essay on normal and abnormal was to redeem those deemed unregenerate in her own middle-class American world. "It does not matter what kind of 'abnormality' we choose for illustration," she wrote, "those which indicate extreme instability, or those which are more in the nature of character traits like sadism or delusions of grandeur or of persecution; there are well-described cultures in which these abnormals function at ease and with honor, and apparently without danger or difficulty to the society" (1934: 60).

Of course that was never really the case with god, even though many of the most successful anthropologists of religion—E. E. Evans-Pritchard, Godfrey Lienhardt, Mary Douglas, Victor Turner—were people of faith, as Thomas Larsen points out in his remarkable book *The slain god* (2014). To be sure, most of these anthropologists did not become Catholics because of their time in the field. Even Evans-Pritchard's conversion has an uneasy relationship to his experience of the supernatural in the field, and if his encounters with the witchcraft-drenched Azande and cucumber-sacrificing Nuer motivated his turn toward faith, the faith he chose was a conventional one back home. While different mores about marriage and medicine and money seem to have led anthropologists to argue for new and unconventional ways of proceeding in their home world (think of Benedict's and Mead's arguments about sex and gender, Victor Turner's discovery of the use of theatre in healing, Marshall Sahlins' account of abundance in egalitarianism), very few anthropologists have argued (in print) that their experience in the field led them to imagine the supernatural at home in new ways. (Edith Turner and Paul Stoller are famous counterexamples; Janet McIntosh's [2004] essay on coming close to the brink and stepping back captures the more common experience, although in her case exceptionally well.)

In fact, most anthropologists have insisted that God, or the gods, cannot be understood anthropologically except through an explicit decision to disavow the idea that such beliefs might be true. Willerslev and Suhr capture this well. They quote Meyer Fortes:

Being in part actors in their own religious systems, theologians must *believe*. Whereas anthropologists . . . cannot but be *agnostic* if they want to achieve objectivity . . . and objectivity, in the sense of analysis and description that are accepted as valid by reason . . . is, surely, a *sine qua non* for all anthropological scholarship. (1980: vii, emphasis in the original)

While all anthropologists study some society's norms of marrying, parenting, buying, ruling, and so forth, from within a subject position they already occupy— from within a largely heteronormative, binarily gendered, democratic, neoliberal social world—they often insist, like Fortes, that they cannot study religion from a subject position of faith. They acknowledge and seek to transcend the limits of heteronormativity, gender binarism, and democratic neoliberalism. But while you think that you cannot study Tallensi faith (for example) as a deeply religious American Christian, they rarely advocate transcending the limits of Christianity by adopting a foreign faith. We call this methodological atheism, and we more or less demand it.

Yet god is the most radically other of radical otherness. One might think that exploring this otherness might be the greatest challenge any anthropologist could bring to the everyday expectations of the world back home. Why have we not done so?

The ontological turn might seem to be the place anthropologists have risen to this challenge of confronting radical otherness. The early ontological writings certainly seemed as if they would. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, Morten Pederson, and Martin Holbraad wrote fiery texts about the ways that most anthropologists examined the belief commitments of people like those in Amazonia, Cuba, and Siberia. These ontologists argued that most anthropologists treated such beliefs with scorn. They argued that most anthropological observers presumed that such beliefs must be wrong, or that we needed to provide an account of why people held false understandings—and that view, the ontologists argued, was driven by deep-seated colonialist impulses or a kind of scientific imperialism. The point of the ontological turn was to insist that we should abandon these presumptions and decolonize anthropological thought. Willerslev and Suhr quote Viveiros de Castro: "Anthropologists must allow that 'visions' are not beliefs, nor consensual views, but rather worlds seen objectively; not world views, but worlds of vision" (2011: 133).

But these ontological anthropologists have not brought back observations from these local worlds in order to reimagine their own. One strongly doubts that Viveiros de Castro himself believes that women can become jaguars (to borrow the famous example). Neither Martin Holbraad nor Morten Pedersen has argued for an ontological understanding of his own world that seems different from the one he held before setting out to do fieldwork. Instead, in the recent (and admirably clear) summary of their position, they both appear to have pulled back from the claim that these other beliefs are veridical accounts of reality. To the extent that Holbraad and Pedersen (2017) accept these non-European belief commitments (the woman became a jaguar), they simply insist that these beliefs are veridical to others—and that, as James Laidlaw (2012) so articulately points out, leads us not into ontological confrontation but into epistemological relativism, the position that anthropologists have always held.

Rane Willerslev and Christian Suhr make a different intellectual move. They focus on moments that are intellectually inexplicable from within an anthropologist's secular worldview, and yet common in the lives of many fieldworkers.

Willerslev and Suhr draw from these moments a disciplinary epistemology of uncertainty and openness. They take the lesson that these events are the way that anthropological insights are made—that it is the shock of such moments that leads people trained into a certain worldview to break open into a different way of seeing. Anthropology grows, they say, with the ability to doubt what one knows, and through doubt, to change what one imagines. "This personal commitment to existential transformation of the self is as essential to the anthropological project as it was to Socrates" (73)

Here Willerslev and Suhr stop. They draw our attention to Lévi-Strauss' decidedly peculiar assertion that the myths he described wrote themselves through him and insist that anthropological knowledge arises through what Kirsten Hastrup (2010) called "raw moments"— events that break through cognitive barriers of culturally trained expectation with explosive force.

I think they should be making an even stronger claim. To my mind, the powerful insight that arises out of the encounter with an alien god—alien to the anthropologist, that is—is that the purpose of life itself can be imagined differently as a result. We secular observers focus on the concept of "god" as a claim to a kind of stuffness— a real immateriality, a nature beyond ordinary nature (a

supernature); perhaps, as George Eliot put it, the sound on the other side of silence. We often miss the important social fact that those of faith also take god to be radically other, too, and as a result, are often more committed to moral purpose than to supernatural reality. As an observer of the faithful, I want to point out that the most fundamental observation about faith is not that divine stuff exists, but that moral purpose in the face of uncertainty will change the world as we know it.

Faith is about seeing the world as it is and experiencing it—to some extent—as the world as it should be. Faith is about having trust that the world is good, safe, and beautiful. The blunt fact that these commitments are held in a world that is often brutal and unfair tells us that faith is hard and requires effort. Belief in a just, fair, good world is not some kind of mistake, not a deluded misconception that observers need to explain, but the fundamental point of the faith commitment—regardless of the supernatural nature of the divine. Faith is about holding certain commitments front and center in your understanding of reality even when the empirical facts seem to contradict them. That is why faith takes work and why faith changes the faithful. It is also why the encounter with the radical otherness of divinity should be central to anthropology, because it encourages the anthropologist to imagine how his or her own world and own life could be fundamentally different.

I take this to be the main argument that Joel Robbins (2006) makes in his answer to the question of what anthropology can learn from theology. There are two standard answers to that question, he tells us. One is to explore the role of theological concepts in our basic anthropological assumptions, as Webb Keane has done by analyzing the role of Protestant ideas in anthropological ideas about agency. The other is to explore possible links between theological ideas that are embedded in various Christian traditions and the emergence of Christian concepts out of the societies that gave rise to them, the way Susan Harding points out that fundamentalism only makes sense within a particular view of language. The third and more powerful way Robbins thinks that anthropology can learn from theology is through envisioning a way to use cultural difference to make meaningful change in the anthropologist's own world. These days, he suggests, we are remarkably cynical about learning from others about how to lead our lives. We tend not to truly value other ways of being. "The tropics as we portray them, wherever they happen to be, have never been so *triste* and devoid of ontological

otherness as they are right now." We are remarkably morose in our diagnoses of the essential problems in human lives. "We have more and more resigned ourselves simply to serve as witnesses to the horror of the world" (2006: 292).

To take the concept of god seriously as an anthropologist is to take seriously what Jonathan Lear (2008) has called the possibility of radical hope: that in the face of the absence of any positive knowledge that hope can be delivered, one still hopes. Lear used the phrase to describe the Crow Nation commitment to a viable future in the aftermath of the annihilation of the tribe. Victor Frankl (1959) used a similar concept in his account of life in a death camp in the absence of any confidence in a divine justice. One chooses to choose to move forward and, in that choosing, creates moral purpose. It was Frankl's account of god.

The anthropological problem with god is that we treat the belief in the supernatural stuff as the heart of the matter. It is not. Far more central is the concept of radical otherness and its concomitant commitment that a sense of moral purpose can change the world as it is into the world as it should be *whether anything empirical about that world changes at all*. I am not suggesting that we become people of faith. I am suggesting that if as anthropologists we took our own uncertainty about what is real seriously—as Willerslev and Suhr suggest that we must—our confrontation with radical otherness would alter our understanding of the possible, our sense of moral purpose, and our capacity to offer hope. That is the real ontological challenge.

References

Benedict, Ruth. 1934. "Anthropology and the abnormal." *Journal of General Psychology* 10 (1): 59–82.

Fortes, Meyer. 1980. "Preface: Anthropologists and theologians: Common interests and divergent approaches." In *Sacrifice*, edited by M. F. C. Bourdillon and Meyer Fortes, v–xix. London: Academic Press for the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland.

Frankl, Victor. 1959. *Man's search for meaning*. Boston: Beacon.

Hastrup, Kirsten. 2010. "Emotional topographies: The sense of place in the North." In *Emotions in the field: The psychology and anthropology of fieldwork experience*, edited by

James Davies and Dimitrina Spencer, 191–211. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
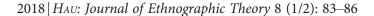
Holbraad, Martin, and Morten Axel Pedersen. 2017. *The ontological turn: An anthropological exposition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Laidlaw, James. 2012. "Ontologically challenged." *Anthropology of This Century*, Issue 4. http://aotcpress.com/articles/ontologically-challenged/.

Larsen, Thomas. 2014. *The slain god: Anthropologists and the Christian faith*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lear, Jonathan. 2008. *Radical hope*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

McIntosh, Janet. 2004. "Maxwell's demons." *Anthropology and Humanism* 29 (1): 63–77.

Robbins, Joel. 2006. "Anthropology and theology: An awkward relationship?" *Anthropology Quarterly* 79 (2): 285–94.

Viveiros de Castro, Eduardo. 2011. "Zeno and the art of anthropology: Of lies, beliefs, paradoxes, and other truths." *Common Knowledge* 17 (1): 128–45.

T. M. LUHRMANN is the Watkins University Professor in the Stanford Anthropology Department. She was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2003 and received a John Guggenheim Fellowship award in 2007. *When God talks back: Understanding the American evangelical relationship with God* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2012) was named a *New York Times* Notable Book of the Year and a Kirkus Reviews Best Book of the Year. Her new book, *Our most troubling madness: Schizophrenia and culture*, was published by the University of California Press in October 2016.

T. M. Luhrmann
Department of Anthropology, Stanford University
Building 50, Stanford, CA 94305, USA
luhrmann@stanford.edu

REJOINDER

God is other(s)

Anthropological pietism and the beings of metamorphosis

Michael W. Sᴄᴏᴛᴛ, *London School of Economics and Political Science*

Rejoinder to Willerslev, Rane, and Christian Suhr. 2018. "Is there a place for faith in anthropology? Religion, reason, and the ethnographer's divine revelation." Hᴀᴜ: *Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 8 (1/2): 65–78

A number of apparent claims that turn out to be red herrings render Rane Willerslev and Christian Suhr's article curiously protean. But if these pseudotheses are set aside, something interesting and potentially helpful emerges. This article may be read, I suggest, as entailing an anthropological theology according to which any form of agency might mediate God or constitute divine agency.

Once identified, this rethinking of agency in relation to divinity may furthermore speak to the aims and claims of another anthropological theology—namely, Bruno Latour's (2013a: 295–325) rethinking of religion as a "mode of existence" among the Moderns. Both of these theological projects offer models of God as a paradox, a Becoming-Being in which the antinomies of relationism and essentialism converge: God is nothing but an open-ended compositional flux eternally generated from within by local relations of mediation and is therefore also an always already transcendent essence.

But whereas Latour asserts that the beings of the mode of existence he calls "religion" may be distinguished from all others by their "saving" works of calling persons into being out of nothing-but-flux, Willerslev and Suhr's characterization of "disruptive experiences" during anthropological fieldwork as sites of "revelation" would seem to imply that this excludes too many agents from divine agency. The ethnographic examples they adduce as in-

dices of divine intervention suggest that, among others, the kinds of beings Latour analyzes as the beings of "metamorphosis" may likewise mediate and generate divinity, not only as saving grace but also as subjectivity-disintegrating rupture. Brought together, these two approaches to anthropological theology begin to intimate, I suggest, what it might look like to bring the Moderns back into "diplomatic relations" with other collectives, cocomposing, in Latour's terms, a new intersection or "crossing" between religion and metamorphosis able to resist the violence of iconoclasm and antifetishism.

In order to stage such a potentially productive encounter between the anthropological theologies of Willerslev and Suhr, on the one hand, and Latour, on the other, I must first offer a few analytical observations about the latter.

I understand Latour to be a relationist philosopher (see Harman 2009). For him, every kind of thing is a relational composition, and there are no a priori essences. Yet Latour's thinking goes beyond relations and gives essences their ontological due as well. Latour (2013a: 259–81) argues that relationally constituted entities *acquire* essences owing to the mode of existence he calls "habit." It is habit that gives things their cumulative character as they negotiate the vicissitudes of discontinuous relational becoming over time. Essence builds up over the duration of any kind of entity, making it the

distinctive, nonrepeatable thing that it is, however composed of or composing of other entities it may be. Such essences are inseparable from the relations that grow them, and vice versa.

As a Modern, I can readily grasp the nature of relationally constituted essences when I contemplate the beings of the mode of existence Latour calls "reproduction," such as a human being whose cellular and other subcutaneous networks of composition are changing all the time yet whose subjectivity and appearance remain relatively stable until dementia or death breaks them down. What is arguably harder to apprehend, however, yet crucial to Latour's project, is his claim that the beings of religion—including but not limited to the being some might choose to call God—are no less relationally constituted essences than the beings of other modes; they are simply composed under very different conditions by very different networks of translation and mediation.

Latour has long sought to renew religion (explicitly identified with Christianity) for the Moderns by redirecting it away from misguided efforts to compete with science in the quest to access remote beings through chains of reference and toward the delicate task of individuating and hallowing beings close at hand (including, perhaps, nonhumans; see Latour 2009, 2013b). If habit already renders essences coeval with the relations that compose them, religion, according to Latour, endows beings as habit-based essences with yet another layer of definition—with soul, saved here and now in an ever-present eschatological fulfillment. But the bearer of this salvation is no radically transcendent deity made immediately present. Salvation is always worked out locally whenever one neighbor precipitates and seals another with the ancient affirmations: "Behold! I am here with you!" "Fear not! Rejoice!" (or prelinguistic vibrations to that effect). For Latour, there is no question of a preexistent God apart from these mediating agencies and the irreducible complexity of becoming in which they participate. Like every other kind of entity, God acquires an essence only by virtue of the myriad relations that generate divinity as saving presence. All of that said, however, it might well be argued that, once framed as eternal, this process itself obviates the distinction between a transcendent and a relational divine essence. If compositional becoming is conceptualized as unbegun, and if the capacity to mediate salvific divine presence is reckoned to nonhuman agents, then perhaps there never was when God was not.

But what of the beings that allegedly do precisely the opposite, the beings of the mode of existence Latour (2013a: 181–205) calls "metamorphosis"? These transformational beings, Latour says, assail and rupture habit-based essences at random, casting fragile subjectivities into crisis, hijacking their trajectories, causing them to sicken or go mad, or even arresting their becomings altogether in death. The Moderns, Latour explains, have largely internalized and psychologized these beings, but other collectives continue to generate and often venerate them as agents whose dangerous powers may sometimes be elicited as helpful. Latour (183) laments that, in their past dealings with other collectives, the Moderns have tended to construct a crossing between metamorphosis and religion that pits the beings of these two modes against each other. Posited as messengers of the one true God, the beings of religion can only ever oppose the beings of metamorphosis as idolaters and their idols, fallen angels, or other rebellious entities.

Yet Latour himself seems to want to keep these two kinds of beings separate from one another in ways that render a posticonoclastic metamorphosis–religion crossing difficult to picture. Latour insists that, although the beings of metamorphosis may be enlisted for good, especially for healing, they remain fundamentally amoral and indiscriminate, using and diffusing others merely as leverage for their own wild leaps of transformation. In contrast, he claims, the beings of religion alone offer themselves as leverage for the assumption of others to secure personhood. How can this clearly evaluative criterion of differentiation not reproduce the old metamorphosis–religion crossing as iconoclasm, replete with its evil impulse to purge the world of evil?

Willerslev and Suhr's contribution to anthropological theology may provide resources for thinking about this question, but only once it is determined what the article is chiefly about. At several points, the authors seem to present as their core claim the idea that anthropological insights are best achieved when "disruptive experiences" push the anthropologist to the limits of his or her reason, inducing a Kierkegaardian "leap of faith" into "a deeply insecure, paradoxical state of being," or "existential uncertainty" (66). They furthermore seem to want to demonstrate that the primary insight thus gained is that non-Western others, who may justifiably be said to have beliefs, dwell in this same existential doubt, uncertain about the premises of their own ontologies and cosmologies and about why things are the way they are. These lines of argumentation clearly

respond to the ontological turn—understood as a transformation of the problem of "apparently irrational beliefs" (see Scott 2013)—and form part of a retreat from and contamination of the concept of ontology as allegedly implying a perfect rational order.

I contend, however, that, by the end, this article comes to be about something different and more interesting. It turns out to be about disruptive experiences that bring the anthropologist to the limits—not of reason, per se—but of self-willed intentional agency as a means to moral transformation as well as cognitive insight, necessitating a leap of faith in a divine agency capable of effecting these desired changes. This theme begins to come to the fore in the section on Socrates and has taken over by the conclusion: "Knowledge depends not only on the actions we take, but equally importantly, on our ability to receive" (74).

This agenda for anthropology as theology is, in other words, a transformation of Christian pietism, filtered through Kierkegaard and augmented by Amira Mittermaier's passion-centered analysis of Sufi dream visionaries (on Kierkegaard and pietism, see Barnett 2011). Recall that, for Kierkegaard ([1849] 1989: 115), the opposite of faith is not *reason*, but sin—disobedience, the will to autonomous self-mastery apart from God. Pietism, like its many descendant holiness practices within Christianity, is all about surrendering self-will and agency and undergoing a passion of the soul—being acted upon by God, whose grace alone is sufficient for faith and regeneration. (Islam can entail this struggle as well, cf. Mittermaier 2012.) Transposed into the register of anthropology, this tradition becomes the surrender of agency—in the form of intentional self-governed ethnographic analyses—in favor of disruptive experiences through which divine intervention may bestow a higher wisdom that somehow becomes a lived practice, a moral revolution of the self and its daily engagement with others. (On Socrates as a "philosophical icon" among pietists, see Barnett 2011: 101.)

It is at this point, arguably, that Willerslev and Suhr's project begins both to intersect with and diverge from Latour's in thought-provoking ways. Like Latour's beings of religion, the thing Willerslev and Suhr call God or divinity appears to be a relationally composed essence, a transcendence generated and made present by many mediators closer at hand. Remarkably, however, unlike the mediators in Latour's mode of religion, the mediators described here bear little relation to the Christian tradition. For Willerslev and Suhr, it seems, there is no limit

to what might turn out to be divinity calling. Entities as diverse as a moose cow and calf appearing in human form as dream visitors, demonic jinn in possession of a devout Muslim, the visionary dreams of Sufi practitioners, fieldwork consultants in general, Socrates' famous "daimon," the operations of myth in the mind of Lévi-Strauss—indeed, hidden aspects of the self, such as the unconscious—can render the mystery of divinity present and unsettling to the self. God is Other, but also potentially all others, even self: "One's own agency becomes indistinguishable from action on the part of the divine" (Howland 2008: 5, quoted in Willerslev and Suhr). Here we are moving toward anthropology as mysticism.

The diverse entities Willerslev and Suhr present as agents of divine revelation might, on that account alone, seem to qualify as beings of religion in Latour's terms, save for the fact that they do not necessarily *save* in Latour's terms. In Latour's terms, these alleged bearers of divine presence look, in fact, like beings of metamorphosis—beings that discompose, disorient, derange, displace, and desubjectivize those who encounter them. As analyzed by Willerslev and Suhr, in other words, these entities challenge Latour's criteria for classifying the beings of religion as separate from the beings of metamorphosis and seem to urge the conclusion that the predicates "being of religion" and "being of metamorphosis" can both be true of the same agent.

Willerslev and Suhr have, in effect, formulated a new anthropological version of Martin Luther's doctrine of the *Deus absconditus* (the hidden and unknowable God), or the more popular notion that evil, suffering, and even destructive personal agents such as Satan constitute and serve the work of the "left hand of God." Contrary to Latour's accounts, the beings of religion are not always edifying to the subject; sometimes they are simultaneously the beings of metamorphosis, tearing down the subject in order to remake it again, disabusing it of its pretensions to autonomy before restoring it as a gift.

Might this recognition that the beings of religion among the Moderns can also be beings of metamorphosis aid diplomatic relations between the Moderns and other collectives? Could the anthropological pietism developed by Willerslev and Suhr help to stage a new metamorphosis–religion crossing without need of either antipagan or antibiblical polemics? Or would such a crossing likely lead to a category error, the mistaken amalgamation of distinct kinds of beings? Would something important thus be lost to the cocomposition of the pluriverse? These are not new debates in the-

ology, but their translation and transformation into anthropological discourses may yet prove revelatory.

References

Barnett, Christopher B. 2011. *Kierkegaard, Pietism and holiness*. New York: Routledge.

Harman, Graham. 2009. *Prince of networks: Bruno Latour and metaphysics*. Melbourne: re.press.

Howland, Jacob. 2008. *Kierkegaard and Socrates: A study in philosophy and faith*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kierkegaard, Søren. (1849) 1989. *The sickness unto death: A Christian psychological exposition for edification and awakening*. Translated by Alastair Hannay. London: Penguin Books.
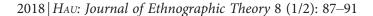
Latour, Bruno. 2009. "Will non-humans be saved? An argument in ecotheology." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (N.S.) 15 (3): 459–75.

———. 2013a. *An inquiry into modes of existence: An anthropology of the moderns*. Translated by Catherine Porter. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

———. 2013b. *Rejoicing, or the torments of religious speech*. Translated by Julie Rose. Cambridge: Polity.

Mittermaier, Amira. 2012. "Dreams from elsewhere: Muslim subjectivities beyond the trope of self-cultivation." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (N.S.) 18 (2): 247–65.

Scott, Michael W. 2013. Review of *Truth in motion: The recursive anthropology of Cuban divination*, by Martin Holbraad. *Religion and Society: Advances in Research* 4 (1): 217–21.

Michael W. Scott teaches anthropology at the London School of Economics and Political Science. His publications include the recent article "To be Makiran is to see like Mr Parrot: The anthropology of wonder in Solomon Islands" (*Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 2016) and the monograph *The severed snake: Matrilineages, making place, and a Melanesian Christianity in Southeast Solomon Islands* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2007).

Michael W. Scott
Department of Anthropology, London School of Economics and Political Science
Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE, UK
M.W.Scott@lse.ac.uk

The absence of the divine

Jacob Cᴏᴘᴇᴍᴀɴ and John Hᴀɢsᴛʀöᴍ, *University of Edinburgh*

Willerslev and Suhr's text is a renewed warrant for the methodological recognition that anthropologists of religion often experience revelatory, transformative, and disruptive events during fieldwork. A catalogue of mystical encounters—resembling what Apter has recently dubbed the "ethnographic X-files" (2017: 297)—is provided: for instance, Evans-Pritchard's unidentified nighttime lights, Bubandt's disconcerting rooftop dog, Willerslev's prophetic dream, and Suhr's whispering djinn. It would be easy to list further examples (e.g., Desjarlais 1992; Young and Goulet 1994; Jacobs 2002), and it is clear that a widespread phenomenon is receiving systematic attention here. As privileged drivers for novel anthropological insights, these experiences suffuse the scholarly core of the discipline with remarkable and perhaps unique generative force. The primary deficit of Willerslev and Suhr's otherwise excellent article, we will show, is their omission of examples that testify to the *absence* of the divine, felt by both interlocutors and anthropologists.

In certain respects, as the authors point out, their arguments are indebted to earlier calls for a dismantling of the disciplinary taboo against a methodological posture of radical participation, self-effacement, and existential transformation—frequently glossed as "going native" (e.g., Turner 1993; Ewing 1994; Fabian 2000). However, they seize on the significant fact that encounters with the divine are often doubt-ridden or even incomprehensible, echoing recent critics of the ontological turn (e.g., Graeber 2015), and new anthropological scholarship on

doubt (e.g., Blanes & Oustinova-Stjepanovic 2015; Pelkmans 2013; Haynes, forthcoming). In other words, the origin and meaning of disruptive experiences—whether in the form of prophetic dreams or manipulative whispers—are at times perceived by interlocutors as "inherently unknowable" (Graeber 2015: 28), foreclosing any recourse to the stable and coherent ontology implied by the problematic adage of the "native's point of view." The inexplicable nature of such events, Willerslev and Suhr contend, is an index of absolute Kierkegaardian paradoxes, provoking questions that "understanding cannot answer," and producing "a type of existential uncertainty that belongs neither to oneself nor to the ethnographic other, but subsumes them both" (72).

Graeber has suggested that the ethnographic record is probably just as ripe with skepticism as it is with revelation, even if it is a kind of doubt that rarely breaks the game: "the aura of at least potential disbelief," as he puts it (2001: 243). Thus, specific hail charms and curers can be branded fraudulent, but such scrutiny tends to "leave the main belief in the prophetic and therapeutic powers of witch-doctors unimpaired" (Evans-Pritchard [1937] 1976: 107; see Lévi-Strauss 1963; Taussig [1998] 2016). Of course, there are also examples of more thoroughgoing disavowal and detachment (e.g., Radin 1927, 1953; Goody 1996). The skepticism that Graeber and others identify is, at least in part, tied to the potential for magical failure and ineptitude—as Bialecki puts it, the divine might exist "as much under erasure as it does

as a presence ethnographically" (2014: 43). The analytical value of taking failure seriously is demonstrated by Oustinova-Stjepanovic's recent study of a Sufi order in Macedonia and the felt incapacity of its adherents, in spite of attempts at reflexive self-discipline, to experience spiritually charged rituals: "'Why are we so inept?' (*Zashto nas ne biva?*)," they ask themselves (2017: 338). There are many other examples of spiritual and prophetic deficit (e.g., Festinger, Riecken, and Schachter 1956; Kendall 1996; Laderman 1996; Lewis 2000; Kravel-Tovi 2009). In line with Graeber's contention that the critical skepticism of interlocutors is often "simply left out of ethnographic accounts" (2015: 11), Oustinova-Stjepanovic charts the default conjectures of anthropological theory that engender an analytical predilection to "discount failure and ineptitude as an 'aberration'" (2017: 339).

It seems only reasonable to expect that many anthropologists will share the trials and shortcomings of their informants. Stoller once proposed that anthropologists of shamanism are especially liable to "experience something so extraordinary that they find no reasonable explanation" (1984: 93), but it took one anthropologist-turned-practitioner eighteen years of *San Pedro*-fueled ceremonies to finally share the visions of her fellow adherents (Glass-Coffin 2010). Bialecki's insightful remarks are again helpful here: "There is a problematic aspect to any encounter with divinity; even a theist can acknowledge that contact with the divine is in no way guaranteed" (2017: 205).

In fact, there is now a modest body of confessional texts by anthropologists describing their own spiritual failures. Morton reflects on "two instances of [his] secular-rationalist embarrassment in the presence of divine revelation" (2013: 235): the first occurred during a lecture when a Cook Islander student had a vision of Morton being transformed into a venerable Aboriginal elder, and the second event took place during his fieldwork in New South Wales, when he was chased from a forbidden sacred site by an unseen creature (242). He found himself incapable of sharing the sense of mystical depth and revelation expressed by his student and informants, citing his "anthropological lack of grace" (245). Kahn, in a similar tone, describes himself as a "poster boy for modern secular selfhood," and reports feeling a visceral unease when his interlocutors detail personal incidents of telepathy, healing powers, rebirth, or palm-reading—phenomena that he calls "radically other to secular experience" (2011: 78). Blanes, reflecting on his fieldwork in Pentecostal churches in Lisbon

and Madrid as "someone who was unwilling either to 'go native' or, on the other hand, conceal his atheism" (2006: 225), also describes feelings of anxiety and embarrassment when participating in intensive rituals (231). He writes: "In order to 'live in Christ' I had to be 'touched by God'—something that is felt in a bodily manner and not rationalised but . . . I had felt nothing so far. I hadn't been anointed by God's grace" (229). In Papua New Guinea, when an Urapmin informant suggested that Robbins was "starting to 'receive' the Holy Spirit," he strongly protested (2015: 124).

In contrast, Suhr describes an example of djinn possession in Denmark, and he reports hearing manipulative whispers. Oustinova-Stjepanovic, in a not too dissimilar case, was herself diagnosed with possession by a male Sufi dervish in Macedonia, which involved "being subjected to manhandling and physical scrutiny during the search for a djinn or spots where evil forces could have hit" (2015: 127). Her physical and emotional discomfort during the exorcism left little room for Willerslev and Suhr's appeal to "accept the impossibility of understanding the power of God in healing" (70). Reflecting on her experience, she arrives at the crucial insight that what is at stake for many atheist anthropologists is not methodological atheism, a strategy she rejects (2015: 115–16). Instead, "dispositional atheism," deeply felt sensory aptitudes or sensibilities, sets the limits of her participation (129). This is a helpful way of thinking about the experiences reported by many atheist anthropologists, such as Kahn, Morton, and Blanes—and all of them write *against* Berger's (1967) version of methodological atheism: for Kahn, it is a violent "ethnocentric exercise" (2011: 82); for Blanes, it is inimical to the recognition of spirits (Blanes and Espírito Santo 2014); Bialecki, who describes himself as "in effect an atheist," reworks it to frame God as an agent in the world (2014: 33); Morton (2013) favors the cross-pollination of anthropology and theology, and, perhaps surprisingly, reads Durkheim as theology; and the list goes on (see Apter 2017). These accounts give a far more accurate picture of how the anthropology of religion looks today compared to what Fortes once wrote about objectivity and reason (1980: vii). Willerslev and Suhr argue that Berger's variant of methodological atheism still occupies the position of a guarded doctrine, but it is obvious that there are considerable limits to that claim.

What might Willerslev and Suhr's article tell us about the "return of theology" in anthropology? Engelke's exposition of Philip Blond's theology is instructive here,

not least given the fact that Blond was trained by Milbank, the lead advocate for Radical Orthodoxy and the author of that lauded title *Theology and social theory* (Milbank 1990), which Robbins (2006) introduced as an exemplar to showcase the productive potential of theology. "There is no such thing as a secular realm," writes Blond (1999: 235), "a part of the world that can be elevated above God and explained and investigated apart from Him." For all their qualms about the analytical cul-de-sac of humanist models of univocal sameness, post-secular theorists are often just as predictable: secularity is reimagined as a fraudulent Christian masquerade, reason is faith (or faith's end, or faith's origin—dealer's choice), and the notion of a nontheological reality is considered just as preposterous as a nonpolitical one (Engelke 2015: 136–37). Once the "secular *episteme*" is unmasked as "post-Christian paganism" (Milbank 1990: 280), a project of radical remaking is warranted: "The very language of politics, as well as that of culture—and thus the very terms of the secular in which they operate—have to be reconfigured at the ontological level" (Engelke 2010). This project is mirrored in Fountain's (2013) call for a remodeled anthropology, or "anthrotheology." But if, as we have shown, secularity is not reducible to intellectual precepts that are ostensibly indebted to Christian antecedents, but exists also in the form of dispositions and sensibilities, then the "return of theology" demands more than a reconfiguration of theoretical languages—it calls for the reconfiguration of selves, or what Willerslev and Suhr call a "personal commitment to existential transformation of the self" (73). The undertaking of such a project is unlikely to ameliorate the absence of the divine.

References

Apter, Andrew. 2017. "Ethnographic X-files and Holbraad's double-bind: Reflections on an ontological turn of events." HAU: *Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 7 (1): 287–302.

Berger, Peter. 1967. *The social reality of religion*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

Bialecki, Jon. 2014. "Does God exist in methodological atheism? On Tanya Luhrmann's *When God talks back* and Bruno Latour." *Anthropology of Consciousness* 25 (1): 32–52.

———. 2017. *A diagram for fire: Miracles and variation in an American charismatic movement*. Oakland: University of California Press.
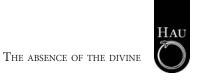
Blanes, Ruy L. 2006. "The atheist anthropologist: Believers and non-believers in anthropological fieldwork." *Social Anthropology* 14 (2): 223–34.

Blanes, Ruy L., and Diana Espírito Santo, eds. 2014. *The social life of spirits*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Blanes, Ruy L., and Galina Oustinova-Stjepanovic. 2015. "Godless people, doubt, and atheism." *Social Analysis* 59 (2): 1–19.

Blond, Philip. 1999. "Perception: From modern painting to the vision in Christ." In *Radical orthodoxy: A new theology*, edited by John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward, 220–42. London: Routledge.

Desjarlais, Robert R. 1992. *Body and emotion: The aesthetics of illness and healing in the Nepal Himalayas*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Engelke, Matthew. 2010. "Radical orthodoxy's new home?" *The Immanent Frame*, https://tif.ssrc.org/2010/03/18/radical-orthodoxys-new-home/.

———. 2015. "On atheism and non-religion: An afterword." *Social Analysis* 59 (2): 135–45.

Evans-Pritchard, E. E. (1937) 1976. *Witchcraft, oracles, and magic among the Azande*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Ewing, Katherine P. 1994. "Dreams from a saint: Anthropological atheism and the temptation to believe." *American Anthropologist* 96 (3): 571–83.

Fabian, Johannes. 2000. *Out of our minds: Reason and madness in the exploration of Central Africa*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Festinger, Leon, Henry W. Riecken, and Stanley Schachter. 1956. *When prophecy fails*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Fortes, Meyer. 1980. "Anthropologists and theologians: Common interests and divergent approaches." In *Sacrifice*, edited by M. F. C. Bourdillon and Meyer Fortes, v–xix. New York: Academic Press for the Royal Anthropologial Institute of Great Britain and Ireland.

Fountain, Philip. 2013. "Toward a post-secular anthropology." *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 24 (3): 310–28.

Glass-Coffin, Bonnie. 2010. "Anthropology, shamanism, and alternate ways of knowing-being in the world: One anthropologist's journey of discovery and transformation." *Anthropology and Humanism* 35 (2): 204–17.

Goody, Jack. 1996. "A kernel of doubt." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (N.S.) 2 (4): 667–81.

Graeber, David. 2001. *Toward an anthropological theory of value: The false coin of our own dreams*. New York: Palgrave.

———. 2015. "Radical alterity is just another way of saying 'reality': A reply to Eduardo Viveiros de Castro." HAU: *Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 5 (2): 1–41.

Haynes, Naomi. Forthcoming. "The benefit of the doubt: On the relationship between doubt and power." *Anthropological Quarterly*.

Jacobs, Janet. 2002. "Transitional identities: Self, other, and the ethnographic process." In *Personal knowledge and beyond: Reshaping the ethnography of religion*, edited by James V. Spickard, J. Shawn Landres, and Meredith B. McGuire, 88–99. New York: New York University Press.

Kahn, Joel. 2011. "Understanding: Between belief and unbelief." *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 22 (1): 76–88.

Kendall, Laurel. 1996. "Initiating performance: The story of Chini, a Korean shaman." In *The performance of healing*, edited by Carol Laderman and Marina Roseman, 17–58. New York: Routledge.

Kravel-Tovi, Michal. 2009. "To see the invisible messiah: Messianic socialization in the wake of a failed prophecy in Chabad." *Religion* 39 (3): 248–60.

Laderman, Carol. 1996. "The poetics of healing in Malay shamanistic performances." In *The performance of healing*, edited by Carol Laderman and Marina Roseman, 115–42. New York: Routledge.

Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1963. "The sorcerer and his magic." In *Structural Anthropology*, 167–85. New York: Basic Books.

Lewis, Gilbert. 2000. *A failure of treatment*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Milbank, John. 1990. *Theology and social theory: Beyond secular reason*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Morton, John. 2013. "Durkheim, Freud and I in aboriginal Australia, or Should anthropology contain theology?" *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 24 (3): 235–49.

Oustinova-Stjepanovic, Galina. 2015. "Confessional anthropology." *Social Analysis* 59 (2): 114–34.

———. 2017. "A catalogue of vice: A sense of failure and incapacity to act among Roma Muslims in Macedonia." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (N.S.) 23 (2): 338–55.

Pelkmans, Mathijs, ed. 2013. *Ethnographies of doubt: Faith and uncertainty in contemporary societies*. New York: I. B. Tauris.

Radin, Paul. 1927. "Skepticism and critique." In *Primitive man as philosopher*, 375–84. London: D. Appleton and Company.

———. 1953. "Psychological types: The religious and the non-religious man." In *The world of primitive man*, 68–104. New York: Henry Schuman.

Robbins, Joel. 2006. "Anthropology and theology: An awkward relationship?" *Anthropological Quarterly* 79 (2): 285–94.

———. 2015. "Engaged disbelief: Communities of detachment in Christianity and in the anthropology of Christianity." In *Detachment: Essays on the limits of relational thinking*, edited by Matei Candea, Joanna Cook, Catherine Trundle, and Thomas Yarrow, 115–27. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Stoller, Paul. 1984. "Eye, mind and word in anthropology." *L'Homme* 24 (3/4): 91–114.

Taussig, Michael. (1998) 2016. "Viscerality, faith, and skepticism: Another theory of magic." HAU: *Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 6 (3): 453–83.

Turner, Edith. 1993. "The reality of spirits: A tabooed or permitted field of study?" *Anthropology of Consciousness* 4 (1): 9–12.

Young, David E., and Jean-Guy Goulet, eds. 1994. *Being changed: The anthropology of extraordinary experience*. Orchard Park, NY: Broadview Press.
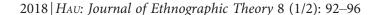
Jacob Copeman is a Senior Lecturer in Social Anthropology at the University of Edinburgh. He is coauthor, with Dwaipayan Banerjee, of the forthcoming monograph *Hematologies: The political life of blood in India* (Cornell University Press).

Jacob Copeman
School of Social and Political Studies, University of Edinburgh
Chrystal Macmillan Building, George Square, Edinburgh EH8 9LD, UK
jacob.copeman@ed.ac.uk

John Hagström is a Ph.D. candidate in Social Anthropology at the University of Edinburgh. His research focuses on nonreligion, secularism, and ethics.

John Hagström
School of Social and Political Studies, University of Edinburgh
Chrystal Macmillan Building, George Square, Edinburgh EH8 9LD, UK
j.o.hagstrom@sms.ed.ac.uk

Faith in anthropology

Christian Suhr, *Aarhus University*
Rane Willerslev, *National Museum of Denmark*

Response to rejoinders to Willerslev, Rane, and Christian Suhr. 2018 "Is there a place for faith in anthropology? Religion, reason, and the ethnographer's divine revelation." Hau: *Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 8 (1/2): 65–78.

What is the relation between religious faith and the kinds of knowledge that anthropologists produce? We began writing our article more than four years ago as an attempt to find possible answers to this question. We shared an urge to deal theoretically with somewhat strange experiences of a religious or spiritual nature that had occurred during our fieldworks and that have had significant impact on our ways of thinking, yet were hard to come to grips with or conceptually contain. Initially the so-called "ontological turn" offered an invitation to take such experiences seriously and not to simply turn away from them as matter out of place. Yet eventually "ontologizing" such encounters with intractable otherness—what we in our article have called the divine— was unsatisfying, in the end appearing to be just another way of conceptually taming it.

We began by scrutinizing the anthropological literature, which is saturated with examples of anthropologists who have had their ways of understanding the world altered in epistemic, existential, ontological, or moral terms through such encounters (see, e.g., Evans-Pritchard 1970; Stoller 1984; E. Turner 2006). As pointed out by Jacob Copeman and John Hagström, our article might indeed be seen as a contribution to what Andrew Apter (2017) has adequately called the "ethnographic X-files."

After submitting a first version of the article in 2014, we received supportive reviews as well as criticisms, the latter arguing that what we had presented was in fact directly antithetical to the project of anthropology. After several revisions, we arrived at the current version. The comments that we have now received appear to be divided between (1) Copeman and Hagström's request for us to moderate the scope of our argument by taking into account the experiences of anthropologists who encounter, not the divine, but the absence of the divine during fieldwork, or for whom the divine is not at all relevant; and (2) Michael Scott and Tanya Luhrmann's requests for us to make an even stronger argument by considering how the confrontation with disruptive experiences of otherness might crucially alter and enable a renewed sense of moral purpose and hope. We are grateful for these comments and for the opportunity to have this conversation. It lies in the continuation of old anthropological and theological debates, which surely will not come to a conclusion in any foreseeable future.

Let us first address the question raised by Copeman and Hagström. In our article we have limited ourselves to a number of anthropologists for whom the encounter with strange phenomena that might be encapsulated as divine left them in doubt about their own previous convictions. For the anthropologists discussed by Copeman and Hagström who felt unable to take on what they believed to be the convictions of their informants, we would still argue that the unsettling effect of these encounters appears to have been profound. Our article is not about

whether one decides to "go native" (E. Turner 2006), convert to Catholicism (Evans-Pritchard 1970), or embrace atheism. What we are concerned with is the impact of such moments of disruption on the creation of anthropological knowledge: moments that might leave the fieldworker in deep doubt, astonishment, and wonder (see also Taussig 2011; da Col 2013; Scott 2013). Attempting to understand how other people inhabit the world, to analyze and write about it in the face of such unsettling encounters with otherness, makes anthropological thinking akin to religious faith. Hence, we argue, along with a number of recent contributions (e.g., Robbins 2006; Larsen 2014; Bielo 2018; Bialecki, in press), that the relationship between theology and anthropology might be closer than is usually acknowledged.

From our fieldwork we could have recounted a number of experiences of being unable to connect with the apparent convictions and religious practices of the people we have worked with, moments that might indeed be described with Galina Oustinova-Stjepanovic's (2015: 129) concept of "dispositional atheism." During recent fieldwork in northern Uganda, Willerslev and his colleague Lotte Meinert observed with great skepticism two healers removing shells from the back of a patient (see also Lévi-Strauss [1963] 1993). The two anthropologists, although they tried to take the ritual actions seriously, simply saw it as trickery, while the local participants apparently experienced a healing. Equally skeptical, Suhr on several occasions attempted to oppose the transgressive exorcisms of patients, urging them instead to seek psychiatric help. Discussing his inability to adequately perceive and understand the workings of religious practices of healing, he was referred to a saying by Abu Bakr—the Prophet's father-in-law—namely that "the incapacity to attain perception is itself perception."

The saying points to a possible shared ground between so-called "people of faith" and people who we might think do not have faith (see also Suhr 2015; Oustinova-Stjepanovic 2017). In the anthropological literature, religious faith is sometimes understood as a mode of epistemic certainty. Our argument is based on the observation that (1) such certainties are often obstacles to religious experience rather than part of it, and that (2) such certainties are sometimes obstacles to anthropological knowledge as well.

In our article we reference a number of anthropologists—some self-identifying converts, some not—who all seem to share unsettling experiences that shook their certainties and opened them up to a different perception of reality. We have tried to make sense of this peculiar and fragile foundation of anthropological knowledge through Søren Kierkegaard's ([1843] 2005: 51–55) concept of faith—a mode of knowing that involves two movements. First, there is the resignation from what one thinks one knows, and from what Scott conceptualizes as self-willed intentional agency. And secondly, there is the leap in which the anthropologist or the religious believer steps back into the world, acts in it, tries to understand it, perhaps even writes about it, yet does so in acute awareness of the impossibility of fully knowing and effectively acting in the world. As Luhrmann points out, faith in this sense involves recognizing the unknowable and unreliable character of the world, while at the same time trying to experience and address the world as it could or should be.

As both Luhrmann and Scott point out, there are moral and ethical implications to this argument. For Emmanuel Levinas ([1961] 1979), the face-to-face encounter with the inaccessible and irreducible otherness of another human being also has an existential dimension. The face of the other reveals our vulnerability and our powerlessness. This is made clear by Levinas in his description of the ethical impossibility of murdering alterity: "The Other . . . marks the end of powers. If I can no longer have power over him it is because he overflows absolutely every idea I can have of him" (87). In the mutual recognition of otherness, anthropologists and those with whom they work might also find themselves in a situation akin to what Victor Turner (1967: 95) has described as *communitas*, sharing the mysterious experiences of another Other that encompasses them both and through which, as Luhrmann points out, "the purpose of life itself can be imagined differently" (80; see also Mittermaier 2012).

What we have done is point to an affinity between the ways in which anthropological insights and religious faith may emerge. Even if we have specifically focused on anthropologists who have studied a range of religious, magical, or spiritual practices, we argue that such unsettling experiences may be equally important to anthropological studies of other aspects of human life.

Copeman and Hagström finish their rejoinder by observing how a "return to theology" would entail more than just theoretical elaboration, but also a personal commitment to existential transformation, including the cultivation of sensibilities and dispositions that would allow an openness toward the possibility of such a relationship between anthropology and theology. Yet they add: "The

undertaking of such a project is unlikely to ameliorate the absence of the divine" (89). While we agree with their first point, we do not find the second point to be the most pressing concern for our discipline, which, as Luhrmann points out, still has great difficulties relating to God, the divine, and what she defines as "the most radically other of radical otherness" (80).

The work of scholars such as Talal Asad (2003), Charles Hirschkind (2011), and the late Saba Mahmood (2015) is relevant to consider in this regard. In her last book, Mahmood (2015: 11) examined how political secularism by no means can be taken as the solution to religious strife. In the context of Egypt, Mahmood demonstrated how, on the contrary, secularism has intensified religious difference and contributed to a worsening of interreligious tensions. Building upon these insights, we have pointed out that despite the ways in which religion has come to be understood in opposition to the secular and to science, and despite the ways in which different religious traditions are often and perhaps increasingly understood in opposition to one another, many of these distinctions are founded on weak essentialized notions of difference. However, these ideas of difference may be difficult to escape, as Scott makes clear in relation to Bruno Latour's distinction between so-called "Moderns" and "other collectives." We agree with Scott that a problem with Latour's analysis of "the beings of metamorphosis" and "the beings of religion" is that it risks reproducing the very dichotomy that it attempts to destabilize. The same is the case for Latour's (2002: 17) distinction between so-called "idol-haters" and "friends of interpretable objects."

Our coreading of experiences and encounters among neo-orthodox Danish Muslims, Egyptian Sufis, Siberian animists, Protestant theologians, and anthropologists and philosophers of various religious or nonreligious convictions does not fit within these distinctions. The differences and similarities between shamans in Siberia and Muslim exorcists in Denmark are as pronounced and relevant as those between what might be conceptualized as Moderns and non-Moderns, Westerners and non-Westerners, idol-haters and idol-makers.

The Muslim community with whom Suhr conducted his research is in Danish media stamped as a hub of blind believers and radical Islamists. Yet as described in the article, for these people doubt was crucial as the condition for submission in faith to the healing of God. A similar pattern was seen in the utmost care that psychiatrists and nurses took in tying psychotropic agents to medical procedures and psychoeducation that for many Muslim patients were experienced as highly disruptive, but which according to the psychiatrists would eventually ensure compliance with the psychotropic treatments and enhance the placebo effect (see also Harrington 2000; van der Geest 2005). In a world in which people, including anthropologists, often appear to reify the boundaries between diverse religious and cultural identities, there is value in highlighting how certain concerns and experiences do appear to be shared across religious, nonreligious, secular, and scholarly traditions.

In our article we have attempted to show how the disruption of what Scott encapsulates as self-willed intentional agency—the moment at which anthropologists lose their analytical grip in the encounter with the otherness of the world—is of crucial importance to the development of anthropological knowledge. Yet a question we have not discussed so far is whether our representational formats are adequate for communicating such insights, which in our view are akin to religious faith. In previous work we have explored the use of montage in anthropological film, exhibition-making, and nonlinear modes of writing that allow for a loosening of the anthropologist's authorial control and the perseverance of irreducible otherness at the heart of analysis (Suhr and Willerslev 2012, 2013). As Oustinova-Stjepanovic (2017: 350) points out, much anthropological scholarship is inadvertently privileging specific ideals of "action-orientated agency" that "postulates human lives in linear terms of cause and effect, impact and outcome." The question is whether this understanding of what goes on in human lives is also a result of the particular modalities of academic writing—of the aesthetics of how anthropologists may assert themselves as authors—along with the accompanying demands for autonomy and intellectual mastery that leave little room for the kind of enigmatic otherness that we in our article have referred to as the divine.

References

Apter, Andrew. 2017. "Ethnographic X-files and Holbraad's double-bind: Reflections on an ontological turn of events." Hau: *Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 7 (1): 287–302.
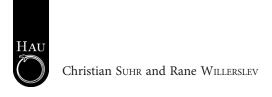
Asad, Talal. 2003. *Formations of the secular: Christianity, Islam, modernity*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Bialecki, Jon. In press. "Anthropology, theology, and the problem of incommensurability." In *Theologically engaged*

anthropology, edited by J. Derrick Lemons. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bielo, James S. 2018. "Anthropology, theology, critique." *Critical Research on Religion* 6 (1): 28–34.

da Col, Giovanni. 2013. "Strathern bottle: On topology, ethnographic theory, and the method of wonder." In *Learning to see in Melanesia*, Marilyn Strathern, vii–xvi. Masterclass Series 2. Manchester: Hau Society for Ethnographic Theory.

Evans-Pritchard, E. E. 1970. "Some reflections on mysticism." *DYN* 1: 99–116.

Harrington, Anne, ed. 2000. *The placebo effect: An interdisciplinary exploration*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Hirschkind, Charles. 2011. "Is there a secular body?" *Cultural Anthropology* 26 (4): 633–47.

Kierkegaard, Søren. (1843) 2005. *Fear and trembling*. Translated by Alastair Hannay. London: Penguin.

Larsen, Timothy. 2014. *The slain God: Anthropologists and the Christian faith*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Latour, Bruno. 2002. "What is iconoclash? Or is there a world beyond the image wars?" In *Iconoclash: Beyond the image wars in science, religion, and art*, edited by Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, 14–37. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Levinas, Emmanuel. (1961) 1979. *Totality and infinity: An essay on exteriority*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers.

Lévi-Strauss, Claude. (1963) 1993. "The sorcerer and his magic." In *Magic, witchcraft, and religion: An anthropological study of the supernatural*, edited by Arthur C. Lehmann and James E. Myers, 169–78. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing Company.

Mahmood, Saba. 2015. *Religious difference in a secular age: A minority report*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Mittermaier, Amira. 2012. "Dreams from elsewhere: Muslim subjectivities beyond the trope of self-cultivation." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (N.S.) 18 (2): 247–65.

Oustinova-Stjepanovic, Galina. 2015. "Confessional anthropology." *Social Analysis* 59 (2): 114–34.

———. 2017. "A catalogue of vice: A sense of failure and incapacity to act among Roma Muslims in Macedonia." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (N.S.) 23 (2): 338–55.

Robbins, Joel. 2006. "Anthropology and theology: An awkward relationship?" *Anthropological Quarterly* 79 (2): 285–94.

Scott, Michael W. 2013. "What I'm reading: The anthropology of ontology (religious science?)" *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (N.S.) 19 (4): 859–72.

Stoller, Paul. 1984. "Eye, mind and word in anthropology." *L'Homme* 24: 91–114.

Suhr, Christian. 2015. "The failed image and the possessed: Examples of invisibility in visual anthropology and Islam." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Society* (N.S.) 21 (S1): 96–112.

Suhr, Christian, and Rane Willerslev. 2012. "Can film show the invisible? The work of montage in ethnographic filmmaking." *Current Anthropology* 53 (3): 282–301.

———. 2013. *Transcultural montage*. New York: Berghahn.

Taussig, Michael. 2011. *I swear I saw this: Drawings in fieldwork notebooks, namely my own*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Turner, Edith. 2006. "Advances in the study of spirit experience: Drawing together many threads." *Anthropology of Consciousness* 17 (2): 33–61.

Turner, Victor. 1967. *The forest of symbols: Aspects of Ndembu ritual*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

van der Geest, Sjaak. 2005. "'Sacraments' in the hospital: Exploring the magic and religion of recovery." *Anthropology and Medicine* 12 (2): 135–50.

Christian SUHR is Assistant Professor and coordinator of the Eye & Mind Laboratory for Visual Anthropology at Aarhus University. He has directed three award-winning films (*Descending with angels* [DER, 2013]; *Unity through culture* [DER, 2011]; and *Ngat is dead* [DER, 2009]) and is the coeditor of *Transcultural montage* (Berghahn, 2013, with Rane Willerslev) and two special issues entitled "Camera as cultural critique" (*Journal of Visual Anthropology*, in press) and "*Al-Ghayb*: The poetics and politics of the unseen in Islam" (*Journal of Contemporary Islam*, 2017).

Christian Suhr
Department of Anthropology, Aarhus University
Moesgård Allé 20, 8270 Højbjerg, Denmark
suhr@cas.au.dk

Rane WILLERSLEV is Director of the National Museum of Denmark. He has his Ph.D. from the University of Cambridge (2003) and is the author of *Soul hunters: Hunting, animism, and personhood among the Siberian Yukaghirs* (University of California Press, 2007), *On the run in Siberia* (University of Minnesota Press, 2012), and a number of articles and edited volumes, many of which are about the spiritual cosmologies of Siberia's indigenous peoples.

Rane Willerslev
The National Museum of Denmark
Frederiksholms Kanal 12, 1220 Copenhagen K, Denmark
Rane.Willerslev@natmus.dk